

September, 1987 \$2.00 U.S./\$2.50 Can.

ALFRED HITCHCOCK's

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



BIRTHRIGHT

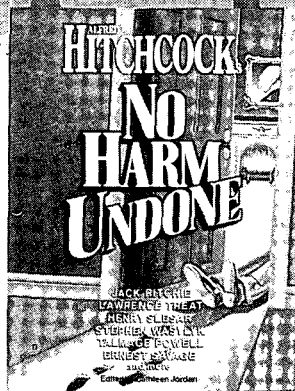
by Elana Lore

...AND MORE
INTRIGUING NEW
CRIME STORIES!



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

With These New Anthologies from Longmeadow Press



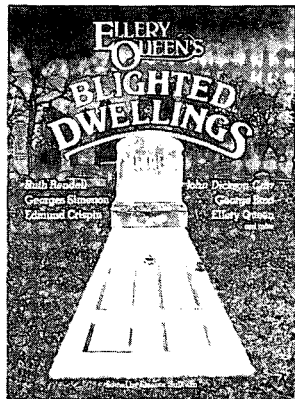
Alfred Hitchcock's world of mystery and suspense

Alfred Hitchcock's No Harm Undone

Edited by Cathleen Jordan

The master of suspense opens his files to compile 24 stories of mystery and intrigue, from some of today's most outstanding suspense authors: Lawrence Treat, Talmage Powell, Jack Ritchie, Henry Slesar and many others.

\$7.95/#7533



Ellery Queen's world of ghostly beings

Ellery Queen's Blighted Dwellings

Edited by Eleanor Sullivan

Renowned writers such as Ruth Rendell, Honore de Balzac, Lilly Carlson and others invite mystery fans to enter homes inhabited by the spectres of the mind, in this collection of 23 ghostly tales.

\$7.95/#7536

Pick them up today at your nearby Waldenbooks store. And while you're there, check out the Waldenbooks Mystery Club, a captivating book club with free membership a monthly newsletter and special savings for mystery and intrigue fans. Sign up today!

America finds it at
Waldenbooks[®]

Books • Audio • Video • Magazines • Book Clubs • Special Orders
Over 975 stores nationwide.

To order call toll-free 1-800-543-1300, Operator #390

(Alaska and Hawaii call 1-800-545-1000, Operator #390)

SK271

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CONTENTS



SHORT STORIES

THE SOUNDS OF SUNDAY MORNING	4
by Augusta Hancock	
GOD BLESS PEDESTRIANS by Lorraine Collins	13
MY SUMMER VACATION by Cal Sharp	25
THE THEFT OF THE FIRE PEARL by Ann F. Woodward	43
BIRTHRIGHT by Elana Lore	62
ONE LAST PICTURE by Sherita Saffer Campbell	94
MUSICIANS DON'T KILL EACH OTHER	102
by Stephen Wasyluk	
OLD FLAME by Taylor McCafferty	118

MYSTERY CLASSIC

THE GREUZE GIRL by Freeman Wills Crofts	129
--	------------

DEPARTMENTS

EDITOR'S NOTES	2
THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH	61
UNSOLVED by H. E. Dudeney	91
SOLUTION TO THE AUGUST "UNSOLVED"	151
BOOKED & PRINTED by Mary Cannon	148
MURDER BY DIRECTION by Peter Shaw	152
THE STORY THAT WON	155

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE Vol. 32, No 9, September, 1987. Published 13 times a year, every 28 days, by Davis Publications, Inc., \$2.00 per copy in the U.S.A. \$2.50 in Canada. Annual subscription \$19.50 in the U.S.A. and possessions; \$23.00 elsewhere payable in advance in U.S. funds. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 1932, Marion, O. 43305. Call (614) 383-3141 with questions regarding your subscription. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing office. Canadian 3rd class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario. © 1987 by Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. The stories in this magazine are all fictitious, and any resemblance between the characters in them and actual persons is completely coincidental. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention. Reproduction or use without express permission of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Printed in U.S.A. All submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. POSTMASTER: Send Form 3579 to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 1932, Marion, Ohio 43305. In Canada return to 628 Monmouth Rd., Windsor, Ontario, N8Y3L1. ISSN: 0002-5224.

Cover by Bradley H. Clark

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

It's getting to be time, once again, to think about Bouchercon, the annual convention of mystery readers, writers, and associated persons. This year's Bouchercon—number eighteen—will take place in Minneapolis on October 9, 10, and 11 at the Ritz Hotel. Lawrence Block is the guest of honor, and a long list of attending writers is already signed up. Scheduled events include an auction, a panel of spouses—"to tell *their* side," a complete day of Sherlockian programming as an alternate to the regular program for that day, emphasis on the Midwest and Canadian mystery scenes, mystery films, the presentation of the Anthony and the Shamus awards, and more.

For information and registration, write to Bouchercon XVIII,

P.O. Box 2747, Loop Station, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55402. Registration is \$25 until July 1, \$35 afterwards. There is an additional fee for attending the Saturday night banquet.

Speaking of Minneapolis, we are pleased to announce that Mary Cannon, our very own book reviewer, has just opened a new mystery bookstore there. It's called Once Upon a Crime, and its address is 604 West 26th Street. We wish her the best of luck with this venture, and know that it will succeed if enthusiasm and knowledge of mysteries have anything to do with it!

All of us were saddened recently by the death of Travis McGee's creator, John D. (Continued on page 42.)

Cathleen Jordan, Editor; **Lois Adams**, Managing Editor; **Brian Cox**, Associate Editor; **Ralph Rubino**, Art Director; **Terri Czezko**, Associate Art Director; **Ron Kuliner**, Art Editor; **Dennis Doyle**, Associate Designer; **Nancy Siwinski**, Art Assistant; **Carole Dixon**, Production Manager; **Judy S. Brown**, Production Assistant; **Cynthia Manson**, Director, Subsidiary Rights; **Florence Eichin**, Manager, Contracts & Permissions; **Louise Mugar**, Circulation Director, Retail Marketing; **James R. Caulkins**, Circulation Planning Director; **Laura Guth**, Circulation Director, Subscriptions; **Veena Raghavan**, Public Relations Promotions Manager; **Irene Bozoki**, Classified Advertising Director; **Risa Lund**, Advertising Services Manager; **William F. Battista**, Publisher
(New York: 212-557-9100; Chicago: 312-346-0712; Los Angeles: 213-785-3114)

Joel Davis, President; **Fred Edinger**, Senior Vice President, Finance; **Paula Collins**, Senior Vice President, Circulation; **Carl Barte**, Vice President, Manufacturing; **Stephen Policoff**, Assistant Vice President, Controller



THIS IS NO OPEN AND SHUT CASE.

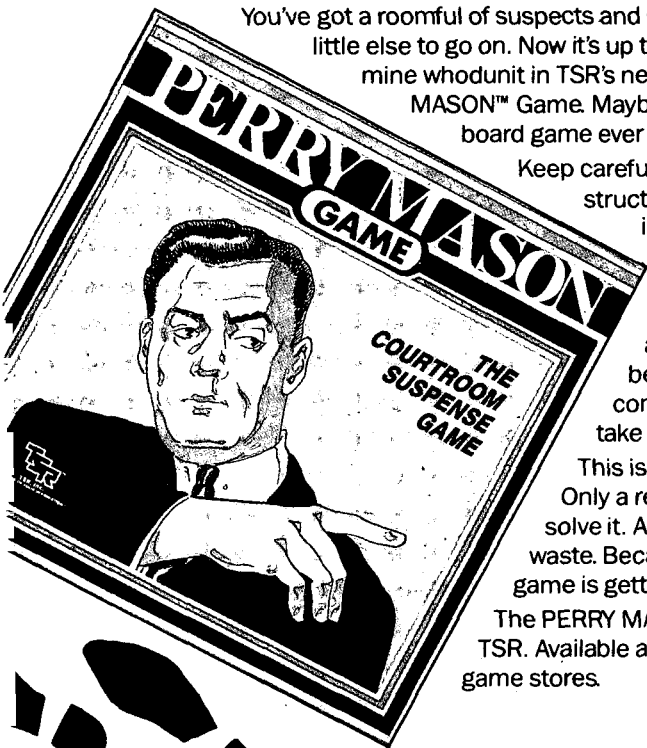
Someone has killed Sumner Hodge.

You've got a roomful of suspects and precious little else to go on. Now it's up to you to determine whodunit in TSR's new PERRY MASON™ Game. Maybe the best mystery board game ever created.

Keep careful notes and try to reconstruct the events of the night in question. Interrogate all the suspects. Was Sumner Hodge black-mailing Jack Talley? Call and recall witnesses. But be forewarned, they may commit perjury or simply take the Fifth.

This is no open and shut case. Only a real PERRY MASON will solve it. And there's no time to waste. Because someone in this game is getting away with murder.

The PERRY MASON Game, new from TSR. Available at most toy, hobby and game stores.



PERRY MASON TM and ©1987 Paisano Productions • The TSR logo is a trademark owned by TSR, Inc. ©1987 TSR, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

The Sounds of Sunday Morning



by Augusta Hancock

Just before the hymn began, the Rev. Jesse Seeker heard Clint Royce's mower chugging up the hill. The Rev. Seeker envisioned Clint seated on the mower in the field that sloped down to the cove beyond and below the church. Clint was a bony-faced, hardworking man who never appeared in the little white church on Sunday mornings, although his mower was often heard outside, roaring near and fading away, returning and diminuendo again, up and down the long field—as if Clint were working his way toward God, then turning back again.

The Rev. Seeker was as concerned about people outside the church as he was about his congregation. When Clint's wife died a couple of years back, the Rev. Seeker had tried to offer Clint

some consolation, had hoped Clint would come to church. Clint's wife had come to services, and once in a while Clint would come with her. But since she'd died Clint had never set his foot inside the church. He worked like a demon. He did not seem to have God on his mind.

The sound of the mower was drowned out by the voices of the congregation—vigorous, if not always on key—and the organ, whose pitch and tone, altered by the damp salt air, were still loud. The outside noises were conquered for the moment.

Clint Royce owned not only the mower but also a grader that sometimes chugged past with noisy insistence. Dave Easton, who lived next door to the church, had a pickup truck with an ailing muffler, in which he did errands during the Sunday service. A little plane out of Wellsworth took sightseers over the coast on Sunday morning, the pilot flying low to point out the coves and lobster pots, the churches and spires and the cars that showed the sizes of the congregations. Meanwhile, outside this church, the normal traffic on the road—including the motorbikes that the young Torreys had acquired this summer—added to the texture of sound.

The Rev. Seeker could do nothing to stop the various Sunday-morning noises, so he used them as best he could. He thought of them symbolically, sometimes wrapping his ideas around them. He dreamed of a service or sermon in which he could get all the sounds to come in—or go out—on cue.

"And an angel of the Lord appeared." A plane would sound overhead.

"Enter into the house of the Lord." Varoom.

He often gave sermons on the dangers and distractions of the modern world. In the orchestrated sermon, perhaps all the motor sounds could come in at once. Then he could say, "Put them behind you"—and all the machinery would stop.

It wouldn't be reverent enough and dignified enough for some people, but it would be attention-getting.

What usually happened was that, when he had expressed his most inspiring thought in the most beautiful phrasing he could muster, he got the raspberry of a passing motorcycle.

Nature also made sounds. Sometimes when the Rev. Seeker paused dramatically after presenting a great moral question, he was answered by a guffawing gull.

There were many possibilities, but no way of orchestrating the sounds; except by happy—or unhappy—accident.

This Sunday, as the hymn ended, the sound of Clint's mower receded. That meant only that he was going downhill, away from the church. He would be back. Meanwhile, the Rev. Seeker could hear a faraway plane.

Now Dave Easton left his house next door in the pickup truck with the roaring muffler. His wife yelled at him over the sound. Did Dave go out on Sunday mornings because his wife yelled at him? She was pretty, but her voice was not gentle. She seemed a decent woman; she did not seem happy with Dave. He was always running around, not accomplishing much. He would have gone out in the truck, yelling or no yelling.

Dave's dog began barking its resentment at being left behind. If only the Rev. Seeker could say in his sermon "the hounds of hell" and have the barking commence. But he didn't give sermons on the hounds of hell. Perhaps he should. Perhaps there was a heavenly message in that yowling. Everything fit into God's pattern somehow.

Now the truck noise had faded, but the plane was overhead. As he began his sermon, a sound like a shot punctuated his phrase. It probably was a shot. Hunting season began in a few weeks. Jeb Reed would be down behind his barn doing some target practice.

"Do unto others . . ." The Rev. Seeker thought of the poor deer. There were too many deer around. He had to make himself think of it that way. Deer ate the vegetable gardens of his flock.

The dog was still barking. Dave's wife yelled at it. The mower was receding downhill.

In the middle of the sermon, a boat motor started up, probably down in the cove. Unfortunately, the Rev. Seeker was not preaching about the perils and metaphors of the sea, but of the difficulties of living on land. The mower coming back up the hill toward the end of the sermon came in too late to make a point. He wondered if the mower was developing engine trouble. It suddenly seemed louder.

The next round of ammunition started just in time to be drowned out by the last hymn.

As soon as the service ended, silence descended, the wonderful silence that had been a charm of this place when the Rev. Seeker had first come here, before its residents became habitually and insatiably seduced by the charms of the combustion engine. Now most of them liked nothing better—no matter how short the distance, how pointless the errand—than to rush around in their var-

ious vehicles. They felt good driving or working something powered by the noisy magic of a motor. Instead of phoning to see if someone was in a certain place, they jumped in a car or truck and went to see. It made some sense; a lot of their work was outdoors where they wouldn't hear a phone. Still, it seemed a little frenetic. The noise which passeth understanding.

As he walked down the aisle, he wished that his congregation could feel about God as they felt about the combustion engine. He could call a sermon "The Combustion Engine." That should draw good attendance.

When the church doors opened and he began to speak to his congregation as they filed out, Dave's dog started howling, counterpoint to the slamming of car doors and the starting of engines. Even those who lived a quarter of a mile away had come in cars.

Tom Lawson and his wife filed by and shook his hand.

"It sounds like the hunting season's about to start," said the Rev. Seeker. He associated Police Chief Lawson with guns, although Tom was unarmed and in his Sunday civilian suit, and didn't much like guns anyway—yet he was fairly good with one.

"As long as they stick to deer, it's no problem for me," Tom replied. "That was a good sermon, in spite of the sound effects."

In the afternoon, the world was absolutely silent. There was not even a breeze. The Rev. Seeker sat on his porch and looked at the apples that hung heavy on his old tree. The spruces were still. There was no noise on the road. Even the birds were silent. Behind him, the refrigerator hummed, but there was no other sound until a squirrel fussed, chirruping in the apple tree. The Rev. Seeker thought of the morning racket and was glad that he could enjoy irony.

At three o'clock, Tom Lawson was painting the porch trim at the back of his house when the phone rang. It was Dave Easton's wife.

"I don't like to bother you on Sunday, Tom, but Dave went off in the truck this morning—"

Yes, thought Tom, I heard him during the church service.

"—and he hasn't come back. He's never done anything like this before. I've asked everybody I can think of, and nobody's seen him. It's downright queer."

"Where was he headed when he went out?"

"He was going over to Jeb Reed's to do a little shooting practice.

But I drove over there, and Jeb says he never came."

"That's no distance at all. Could he have set out to do something else first?"

"Not as I know of. Even if he'd done something else, he'd of been home by now."

Tom had heard that Dave and his wife weren't getting on so well. But it didn't seem likely that Dave had just skipped out.

"You and he didn't have a fight or anything this morning, did you?" Tom thought of her yelling over the sound of the truck muffler during the service.

"We certainly did not."

"I'll see what I can find out."

Tom hung up, wiped his brush, put it in paint remover, and called to his wife to say that he was going out.

He stopped by Jeb Reed's, but Jeb didn't know anything. Tom saw no trace of Dave or the truck as he passed along the road. He looked out over the field where he'd heard Clint mowing, then he passed the church and came to Dave's house. Dave's wife's car was parked in front. The dog came around and barked and howled at him. Dave's wife was tearful and ignorant.

Tom went to see the Rev. Seeker. They had ironed out problems together in the past.

"Before I go all along the road looking in every bush and alder for Dave, let's you and me think about what we heard this morning," Tom said. "We heard Dave go off, and we heard some other things. As usual, there was a lot of noise. I sometimes think people save up all their noisy chores for Sunday morning just outside the church."

The Rev. Seeker smiled. He'd always liked Tom Lawson, always thought he was very perceptive.

"I'm wondering if what I heard this morning adds up to anything," Tom went on. "I know you were concentrating on the sermon and the service, but could you remember what you heard and when you heard it?"

"I think I could."

"Let's play a little game. You write down what you heard in the order you remember hearing it, and I'll do the same thing."

The Rev. Seeker went to what he called his "sermon desk" and got paper and pencils.

The two men settled down on the porch, looking out past the apple tree toward the sea and the cove. It was going to be a good

sunset, thought the Rev. Seeker. After a time, in which they alternately reflected and scratched pencil to paper, they looked at each other and nodded.

The Rev. Seeker began. "There were some traffic noises. Nothing in particular I could sort out. Then there was Clint's mower close to the church. That began just before the sermon. He went up and down a few times. Then Dave went out in his truck. His wife yelled at him, and his dog barked. Then I guess I heard the mower again, but probably not as close as before. Then there was a plane. I'd heard it faraway, but now it was overhead. After the plane, there was shooting practice, first a single shot and then a group of shots. The mower—it seems to me that it went away. Then I heard a boat—it seemed to be starting up. Sounded like a lobster boat, probably in the cove. Then I guess I heard the mower coming back. It sounded even louder than before. You see, I try to work these sounds into the sermon—might's well do something with them—so I think I've got it just about right."

Tom smiled. "We have the same pattern of what we heard. But there's one more thing about the sound of the mower. It seems to me that there was a time when that mower was kind of idling. Its sound was a little different then."

"Yes. That was while I was talking about hanging in and holding on, and it seemed appropriate that the mower was in a holding position. It was as if Clint was having trouble with the engine because then it got going louder than ever."

"That was just after the plane. As the plane noise went away, I heard that mower holding. Then there was a shot, and the mower was still making that sound."

"Yes, I was talking about holding on despite all disasters and distractions, and the shot came while the mower motor was idling. The sounds worked in with the sermon better than usual this morning."

"The boat—any ideas about that?"

"Nothing I could be sure of. Clint's brother keeps his lobster boat down in the cove. His boat doesn't speak as distinctively as Dave's truck does. But I was thinking, when I heard that boat, that Clint makes noise on land and his brother on the water. The pattern fit the phrasing of what I was saying."

"Thank you, reverend. You've helped."

"It seems to me Dave's dog was barking longer and more frantically than usual."

Tom looked reflective. "Thanks. I hadn't thought about that."

Tom called the pilot of the little sightseeing plane.

"I didn't see anything special. I saw the church and the cars outside. There was nobody around except two men in a field just over from the church."

"What were they doing?"

"One of them was sitting up on a mower. The other was standing in the field, making some gestures with his arms. I didn't pay too much attention. I had to pull up then and bring her about to go over toward Carman's Cove and point that out to the passengers, so I couldn't see that field any more."

"Was there a truck there?"

"Yeah, I guess there was. In the dirt road that goes into that field."

"Have you talked to Clint?" Tom's wife asked.

"I'll talk to him very shortly. I've got one more thing to do before I go to see Clint."

"You'd think somebody would have heard that truck. It sure has its own loud voice."

"But nobody says they heard it."

Tom went back to the field. The mowing job on the far side didn't go in long, straight sweeps the way the rest did. He walked from the field to a bordering wooded area, which led to an old quarry long since grown up in trees. Generations ago, the Royces had quarried granite. Tom stumbled through the brush-covered rocks till he came to the edge of the quarry. Some of the scrub branches were broken. The truck had mostly disappeared down in the tree growth, but part of its rear end was visible. Tom could even see through the leaves the license plate and the tailpipe of the ailing muffler.

Tom drove up to Clint's house on a dirt road near the church, across the road from the field. The mower and the grader were out back. Clint's station wagon was parked in front. The house was quiet.

Tom knocked. Footsteps. Clint opened the door and nodded at Tom. He never had been much of one for words.

"I'm wondering if you've got any idea where Dave Easton might be," Tom said as he stepped inside.

Clint shook his head. "Nope."

"I guess you and him were talking in the field while you were mowing. During church. I guess nobody else has seen him since."

Clint frowned. It was clear that he hadn't expected Tom to know that much.

Clint looked around uncertainly.

"That first shot wasn't Jeb practicing, was it? Jeb started shooting a little later. The sounds were different. The first shot came from a different gun, from the direction of the field where you were mowing. Dave's truck must have got run down into that old quarry while the mower was running. The mower masked the sound pretty well."

Clint moved quickly. Tom cursed himself for not having seen what Clint was going to do. Turning fast, Clint moved from the hall into the kitchen and slammed the kitchen door in Tom's face.

By the time Tom got the door open, Clint had disappeared out the back door. Tom thought Clint would try to get away in the station wagon—although Tom's car was blocking it—but Clint abandoned the combustion engine and reverted to nature. Tom glimpsed him running through the woods and took out after him.

Shots rang out. Jeb's practice range was straight ahead. Tom heard a cry. He ran around the long way yelling at Jeb to stop shooting.

But it was too late.

The following Sunday, the Rev. Seeker stepped into the pulpit. Outside the church the excited voices of children biking past splashed the air. He should have been talking about the youth of today. But his mind and those of the congregation were on other matters.

Last Sunday evening Clint's brother had come to the Rev. Seeker's house. He sat looking at the afterglow over the cove, twisting his cap in his hands.

"Clint was on the mower when Dave drove up yelling about how Clint should leave his wife alone. Clint hadn't done nothing with Dave's wife. She was a nice woman, felt sorry for Clint, wanted to ask Clint to dinner with her and Dave. That was all. Wanted to take Clint something extra she'd cooked. But Dave didn't like that. Dave never did have much sense. Never did much of anything. But he thought he owned that woman.

"Dave pulled a gun on Clint when Clint was up on the mower. Dave probably didn't mean anything except to scare Clint. But

Clint couldn't know that. He jumped down off the mower and wrestled the gun away from Dave. Clint's stronger than Dave. Dave grabbed Clint's hand and the gun went off. I can't say how much Clint meant to shoot him, how much was accident. Clint gets pretty mad. All I know's what Clint told me.

"He saw Dave was dead, and he put him on the mower and brought him down the hill and asked me to take him out in the boat. I shouldn't have done that, I know, but there was my brother in trouble and there was that corpse that looked like it wanted to be got rid of, and there was my boat and that big sea, so I took the body and the gun out and dumped them."

Just as he was finishing his confession to the pastor, Tom Lawson came in and found him.

All these things were going on in Rev. Seeker's mind as he was delivering the sermon. The truck, the mower, the grader would no longer interrupt him. And the little sightseeing plane stopped running after the Labor Day weekend. Right now there was no boat motor and no nearby guns. Clint's brother had been arrested as an accessory, and Jeb Reed's gun license had been suspended. Jeb hadn't meant to kill Clint, of course. Clint just happened to be where he was shooting. All the noises of last Sunday were quieted, except for Dave's dog, who was barking and howling in the direction of the church because Dave's wife had come to church this morning and was sitting in the front row, tragic and contrite. Jeb Reed was sitting next to her.

If they'd all been in church, instead of making all that noise, none of this would have happened—or maybe it would have happened some other way. But the Sabbath is the day for doing all the noisy chores that you haven't had time for all week—including murder.

As he was talking about the blessings of God found in nature, he heard the drilling of a well. That shouldn't be a Sunday sound, but it was appropriate to his sermon. He began to think of its possible criminal implications. Perhaps he could build a sermon around the idea of detection.

The Lord works in mysterious ways. That was his theme now.

His last uplifting words of hope were drowned out by rock-blaring music from a passing, open-windowed car.

FICTION

God Bless Pedestrians

by Lorraine Collins



Illustration by Jim Ceribello

13

CERIBELLO 87

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Just about all the calls that came into the police dispatch desk were about cars—car wrecks, stolen cars, complaints about speeding cars, junked cars left abandoned on streets—and most of the rest of the calls were about motorbikes and bicycles. The motorbikes were too loud, and the bicycles were stolen from garages. If it wasn't about a vehicle, the complaint probably involved tools and stereos stolen, liquor stores broken into at three in the morning, shoplifting offenses at the World of Discount Store. Hardly any calls involved people instead of property, so it was always interesting, maybe even exciting, whenever there was a call about a human being, even if it was just a drunk and disorderly, or a family disturbance. When the dispatcher said this call was about a college student, the duty officer was intrigued but he figured it was another kid who didn't come home for spring break. They always showed up eventually.

"Mr. Hatch?" he said in a voice meant to be kind but efficient. "Your son is missing?"

"No, sir," the voice said. "It's my parents."

Well, that was a new one.

"Hey, Sandy," the officer said when Browne came in, "look at this!"

Sandy Browne, chief of detectives, often complained about the lack of interesting cases in his jurisdiction, even though, as a native of the area, he felt a certain loyalty to the plain society of the plains states. The officer waved the report in the air. "It's a college kid, and this time it's the *kid* complaining that his *parents* are missing! How about that?"

"No kidding, George?" Browne walked over to his desk and took the report to glance at it. "How long have the folks been gone?"

"No way to tell. The kid came home yesterday and they weren't home. Never showed up."

"What about the car?"

"In the garage."

"Pedestrians? We're talking about missing people who took a *walk*? I don't believe it." Browne scanned the report. William P. Hatch, Jr., had arrived home at five thirty in the afternoon, as expected, on spring break from the state university. Nobody home, the house not locked, but that didn't surprise him. He drank a beer, watched TV, ate a snack, waited. He finally went out to the garage, found the family car there, started looking around, phoning the neighbors. He drank some more beer and watched some more TV and fell asleep and when nobody showed up

this morning, he put in a call to his sister on the west coast. But she didn't know anything about it, so he called the police.

"Where does William Hatch, Sr., work?" Sandy Browne couldn't see a business address on the form and he thought George had screwed up again.

"He's retired. As of last year. When TJW closed its doors." The big plant provided a lot of jobs in town for twenty-five years, and then the home office announced something they called "extensive restructuring" and within a few months there weren't any jobs any more.

Sandy Browne glanced at his watch. It was noon but he was supposed to skip lunch anyway. That was his latest idea, since he couldn't stand the thought of missing breakfast or dinner. An apple in his pocket was lunch.

"I'll go look around," he said.

He drove over to the Hatch residence, which was a pretty well kept brick house in a fading part of town, big trees, some lilac hedges. There were a lot of neighborhoods like this in cities scattered on the plains of the Midwest, and Sandy Browne had seen a lot of them. He'd started out in law enforcement working in nondescript, squarely laid out towns where the biggest building in town was the high school, and in

thirty-two years moved up to cities with ten story hotels, fifteen story office buildings, and an airport. He knew his territory and he usually liked it, glamorous or not.

He pulled into the driveway of number 132 Greenwood and parked behind a compact station wagon with a university parking sticker on the rear window.

Before he could ring the doorbell, William P. Hatch, Jr., opened the door. "Are you with the police? Find them?" He looked bright-eyed and nervous, a skinny barefoot kid in a T-shirt and jeans. Supposed to be twenty years old, but didn't look it.

"Not yet, but then I just got the message." He introduced himself and shook hands, looking around the living room while he did. The morning newspaper was scattered on the coffee table and there were some beer cans stashed in the brass log carrier by the fireplace. "No calls from anybody? Any neighbors come by with news?"

The kid shook his head. "It's really weird."

"They knew you were coming?"

"Sure. I talked to them two days ago. They really wanted me to come home for vacation even though I've got—other things I could do. They said there would be a surprise." He

gave a shallow laugh. "Some surprise!"

Sandy realized the kid was embarrassed. It must be hard to keep the image of sophisticated college man when you wonder where mom and dad are. "Is it all right with you if I look around?" He had to have permission from somebody, and under the circumstances, the boy would do. He wandered through the house asking questions as he went. No, they didn't have another car besides the one in the garage and the one William, Jr., had taken to school. Since his dad was . . . retired . . . he didn't need to drive to work any more. Junior really wanted his own car, but right now he was using his mother's. His sister had no idea where the folks might be, and neither did anybody else he could think of to ask. The people across the street were gone, and the house next door had been vacant for several months. The people at the corner had seen them the day before, but nobody had seen them leave. He'd checked the hospitals, and asked about accident reports, and had searched high and low for a message. There wasn't any.

"What about money? Is your mother's purse still here? How about coats and hats, suitcases?"

"I haven't found her purse anywhere. I don't remember what coats they have. My dad wears a blue windbreaker a lot of times . . . I don't see it around."

Sandy figured that the boy was about as observant of parents as most kids are. His own daughter probably couldn't remember if his eyes were blue or orange. His granddaughter could, though. "Beautiful, beautiful brown eyes!" she'd sing, and giggle. Eight years old and a charmer for sure.

"Do they ever go for walks at night, climb up hillsides and gaze at the moon?" The kid looked at him like he was crazy.

In the kitchen everything looked neat enough except for what damage the boy could do in less than twenty-four hours at home, and the refrigerator seemed well stocked. There was some leftover potato salad that looked good and a couple of pieces of chicken. Sandy's stomach growled. He went on out to the garage and very carefully went through the car—a four door Chevy sedan, three years old—and as long as he was in the business, and had the owner's permission, he took a careful look at the kid's car, too. Nothing suspicious. He looked in the bathrooms and under the beds, and pulled the attic door down in the upstairs hall to

climb the ladder and peer up there, too. No bloodstains, no signs of violence. He didn't think there were any dead bodies on the place.

"I guess you'd better find me a picture of your folks," he said.

The photo showed a couple who were so middle-class Midwestern that they were almost invisible; she was a little overweight but not bad, he was a bit balding but not much. Ordinary people, typical parents.

But, as George said, it's not every day that the parents run away from the kid, instead of vice versa. Sandy thought about that as he drove slowly back to the station. When he got there, he asked a patrol car to circle around the neighborhood with the photos, make a few inquiries.

He asked George to call William Hatch's brother in Sun City, Mildred Hatch's sister in L.A., and the bank. He got somebody on the phone to the airport and the bus station but decided he had better call young Willie Hatch's sister himself. He wanted to know how the boy got along with his parents. You never knew what a kid might do, these days, and if nobody had seen the parents leave, it was also true that nobody had seen the boy arrive. Who was to say when that was, and what happened after he got there?

“A ny chance your dad got a new job or something like that? Could that

be the surprise he told your brother about?” Sandy was not having a very satisfactory conversation with Sara Hatch, who seemed a little spacey to him. He mistrusted everybody in California anyway and was grateful that his own daughter had moved to Florida instead.

“Gosh, I don't think so. Are they really *missing*?”

“Well, they've been gone at least twenty-four hours but the car's still there. No signs they planned to be gone.”

“Should I come home, do you think?”

“That's up to you, but there's nothing to do here.”

Her voice suddenly sounded less flippant and cool. “I thought—I thought Willie was just being—*Willie*.”

“And how's that?”

“You know—silly Willie. Real dumb, spoiled. A little brother. Came home to mommy and daddy but they weren't there so he panics. He's never been one to stand on his own two feet.”

“What could the surprise have been, do you suppose?”

“I don't know. Something for Willie, no doubt. They spoil him rotten.” Sara Hatch was seven years older than her brother and it showed.

“There’s just this one thing here.” The patrolman who had been talking to neighbors flipped through his notes. “The guy at the corner noticed a strange car around the neighborhood, circling around the block, late in the afternoon before the Hatch kid came home. The reason he noticed the car was it was a real sporty job, not exactly a Corvette but something like a Datsun ZX or a Camaro, he’s not sure. Silver with a blue racing stripe, classy. They don’t see many like that around there.”

“Anything like it on the list?”

“Don’t think so.”

George got up from his desk by the glass doors that separated the police department from the rest of City Hall and came over to Sandy’s cluttered little corner of the world. “There is now,” he said, and handed him the latest printout. A car of that description had been reported missing from the airport parking lot an hour before, when the owner came back from a four-day trip to Las Vegas and reported it.

“Don’t they have security out there, for God’s sake?”

“Compared to what?”

Sandy shook his head. “Anybody who leaves a car like that in a parking lot . . . Who’s the owner?”

“Name’s Jerry Billman.”

“What was he doing in Vegas?”

“What does anybody do?” George shrugged. “Here’s the word from Hatch’s bank. He made a big deposit this week and that’s probably the money he had left in his TJW pension fund account or profit sharing, or whichever. Retirees have a while to decide what to do with it and he apparently just decided to collect the cash.”

“A big deposit this week but no big withdrawal?”

“You got it.” George dropped the reports on Sandy’s desk and went back to his own because his phone was ringing again. “Yeh?” he said into the phone. “A missing *tricycle*?” He rolled his eyes heavenward.

Sandy picked up the reports from the patrolman and George and stared at them for a while, beginning to form a suspicion. Then he looked up William Hatch’s phone number and wrote it on a scrap of paper. He got up and wandered over to the table by the coffee machine and rummaged around among the newspapers scattered on it until he came up with the *Penny Saver* weekly freebee where everybody advertised everything they wanted to buy and sell, and looked in the car section. Always a lot of cars listed, page after page of automobiles.

Sometimes he thought America was going to sink under the weight of piles and piles of used cars. He found the ad after ten minutes of scanning the columns.

"Will pay cash for late model sports car good condition, reasonable." And the phone number of William P. Hatch.

So there was junior's surprise. He should have known there was a car in the picture someplace. He shook his head, muttering. Then he phoned the sheriff's office and the highway patrol and asked for high priority help in scouring the countryside for a stolen car, a new silver and blue Datsun ZX belonging to Jerry Billman, missing from the airport for at least twenty-four hours, may be involved in other felonies. Last reported on Greenwood Avenue.

"Are you trying to tell me somebody stole my car to sell it right here, in this town? Not even changing a thing? Just sell it? That's crazy. Car thieves aren't that dumb, not even out here!"

"I wouldn't think so, no." After only a few minutes of conversation, Sandy Browne knew that he didn't like Jerry Billman. One of those Yuppie types they write about in magazines,

only tougher, always out for the main chance. Easy to tell who was number one in his book, but he was temporarily banished to the boondocks in connection with TJW's "restructuring." It had taken him a year to wind things down and now, as soon as he had arranged for the disposal of everything that wasn't nailed down, he'd be back in California where he belonged.

Sandy was beginning to regret having invited Billman to eat dinner with him at the Red Rose cafe while they talked about the interesting aspects of this case. Sandy ate at the Red Rose two or three times a week because the only thing he'd ever learned to cook was scrambled eggs, even after two years of fending for himself after his wife died.

"But let's say somebody is that dumb," Sandy said, buttering a roll. "He sees the ad Hatch put in the paper, steals your car, shows it to him, hopes to get some of that quick cash. He shows some phony papers, signs a bill of sale, or at least hopes to get a down payment, say. He'll get what he can and leave town in a hurry. Could be done."

"So why isn't my car in Hatch's garage?"

"You know him, by the way?"

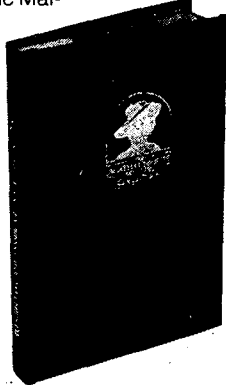
"Should I?"

GET INVOLVED IN THE PERFECT CRIMES

through
The Agatha Christie Mystery Collection

Enter into the intriguing world of Agatha Christie, and marvel at the supreme intellect and intuition of her celebrated mysteries. Mysteries constructed like clockwork, with every motive and character carefully inter-linked. Mysteries solved by some of the most unforgettable sleuths in the world...

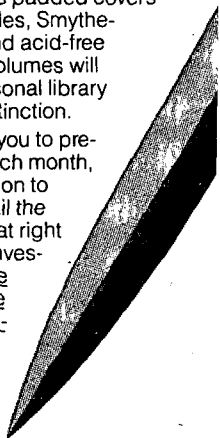
Like the dapper Hercule Poirot, who relies on his "little grey cells" to solve crimes. Miss Jane Marple, whose insights into the people of her own small town help her understand the criminal mind. Plus other fascinating detective characters who are your guides through plot after suspenseful plot.



Exclusive Devonshire Editions

Each volume in The Agatha Christie Mystery Collection is a hardcover Devonshire Edition, crafted in the tradition of fine English bookbinding in Sussex blue leatherette. Each matched volume features padded covers with gold foil titles, Smythsewn pages and acid-free papers. Your volumes will become a personal library of stunning distinction.

Now, we invite you to preview a novel each month, without obligation to buy. Simply mail the postpaid card at right to begin your investigation into The Agatha Christie Mystery Collection. You'll find it a most arresting experience!



All Aboard for Murder!

In your first free-preview volume, you are aboard the fabled Orient Express—and murder rides the rails. It is up to Inspector Hercule Poirot to unmask the killer. A most difficult task—since everyone on the train is a prime suspect! Send for **MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS** now and savor every detail of this superbly-told tale. It is yours to examine and enjoy...

FREE FOR 10 DAYS

"He worked for your company for twenty years. But so did a lot of people."

Billman was probably hit with that a lot. He sounded defensive when he said, "I heard the name. He was a foreman, I think, and he took early retirement. But I never met him. So what do you think he did with my car? Steal it from the thief?" The sarcasm was pretty heavy.

"That's one good question, but I've got some others." Sandy dug into the roast beef and brown gravy as he talked.

"Such as?" Billman was eating shrimp, but Sandy thought anybody who would eat shrimp fifteen hundred miles from an ocean in a restaurant like the Red Rose was nuts.

"Well, I wondered why you left your car in an airport parking lot again, after losing one just like it in an airport lot out there in California? Just last year." That was Sandy's bombshell, and he loved tossing it out like that, watching Billman's reaction. "Wouldn't it be better just to take a taxi to the airport?"

Billman looked up quickly. "What do you mean?"

Sandy enjoyed that, being one up on the big man from California, and it compensated a little bit for the way he'd felt talking to the detective in L.A. He felt like a hick cop, to tell

the truth. After he sent word out about Billman's car, a very interesting response came clattering over the telex. A computer somewhere had made a matchup with Billman's name and another stolen ZX a year ago. A detective assigned to investigating stolen cars in L.A. wanted to know if this was the same guy.

Knowing that California is at least an hour behind everybody else in the country, no matter how many decades ahead it claims to be, Sandy called the cop and had an interesting conversation with him about the stolen car business. It was a pretty big business out there and they talked about it quite a while. He and the L.A. detective were both curious about Billman's real bad luck with cars parked in airports.

"What do I mean? Well, I'll tell you," Sandy said. "Do you know some people actually steal their own cars? They can't keep up the payments, so they just drive them into rivers or lakes or report them stolen and collect the insurance. Only if we find the car, all the hubcaps are still on, and the radio hasn't been swiped, so it's pretty clear what really happened."

"I didn't steal my own car," Billman said. "I was in Vegas."

"Yeah, well. Did you know that fifteen percent of the peo-

ple who swipe their own cars do the same thing again? I found that out just today. Drives insurance companies nuts. Of course most of those guys don't have much imagination and just want to quit making payments and so they do the job themselves. But let's say you didn't want to dump the car. You wanted it to retain its value. In that case, you'd arrange for somebody to do it while your back was turned, wouldn't you?"

Billman put his napkin down on top of the table and shoved his chair back. "You making accusations, Browne? I don't have to listen."

"Aw, let me tell you a theory, okay? You see, it's important to me because your car is just about the only clue we have to what might have happened to Mr. and Mrs. Hatch."

Billman looked at him angrily but then he settled back in his chair and said, "Okay. Let's hear it."

Sandy wished he had enough men on the force to set up a surveillance of Billman for a few days. If he did, he wouldn't have to sit here and invent theories. He reached for the apple pie and waved a hand at the waitress for more coffee.

"Look," Sandy said, leaning his elbows on the table and holding up his coffee cup. "A

guy likes to gamble, say. Goes to Vegas a lot. He's not a high roller because he doesn't have a lot of money, just a good job and a fancy car. For most people in America, a car is just about the biggest investment they ever make unless they buy a house, right? So the car is an asset. Of course, you can always take a second mortgage on a house, to raise money if you need to, but how can you get money out of a car twice?"

"You tell me. And then tell me where my car is."

"If a guy owed like six or eight thousand dollars, say, to people who like to collect their debts, he might give them his fancy car. They'd have to be people who knew what to do with a car like that, where to take it, who to sell it to. But it would work. The creditor gets the car, the lien holder gets paid off by the insurance company, and the owner gets enough money to go make a down payment on another car. Why not? Especially if you live in California, anyway, where they load those cars by the dozens onto ships and send them out of the country. So I'm told."

Sandy was pleased with Billman's reaction to his recital. He looked a little sick and was extremely still and quiet. "That's my theory anyway," Sandy said. "And of course, if you're out of

town when the car gets stolen, you don't have to report it right away. Gives everybody more time. Of course, it would be a little harder to accomplish out here, without real professional thieves to rely on."

Sandy paused to sip his coffee, looking at Billman over the rim of his cup. The guy just sat there, not saying a word. "I think that's what went wrong," Sandy said. "You just can't get good, reliable, professional help out here, and some amateur screwed up the deal. One car is penny ante for the pros, but like I say, for most of us it's a big deal. You know what we hear most about in the police department? Cars. I guess I wasn't surprised to find out that the disappearance of Mr. and Mrs. Hatch might involve a car. Practically everything else around here does."

"So what's the point?"

"I thought if you could give me some idea who might have taken your car, and when, and where he was going with it, we might find out what went wrong and where those people are. It would be—sort of a good thing to do. Before something goes really wrong. Before they get hurt or killed and everything gets really bad."

Billman didn't say anything. Sandy put his cup down and folded his napkin carefully be-

side his plate. "If it was just a car I wouldn't bother you about it, but these are *people* we're talking about." He wondered if he should say, "Willie's mom and dad," or "real nice, innocent people" or something else that might warm a cold heart. Finally he said, "The way things stand, you might want to get your car back because I don't think you'll have much luck with getting insurance any more. From now on you'll be driving a VW beetle made in 1969. If you're lucky."

"Of course I want my car back!" Billman said. "I don't know what you've been talking about! I want that clearly understood."

Sandy nodded. "Understood."

"I was thinking of asking about a guy named Kenton over in Parker County. I hear he's in the business. I thought I'd ask . . . if he knew where my car was, and try to get it back." He was sweating. "I really love that car!"

"Never mind calling him," Sandy said. "I'll look into it for you." He smiled and picked up the check. "My treat."

Sandy Browne was with the highway patrol and the Parker County sheriff when they opened the barn door at Sam Kenton's place and found the car, somewhat

crumpled but still in good running condition, and Mr. and Mrs. William Hatch tied up together lying on a pile of hay, madder than hell but okay otherwise. Kenton was trying to straighten out some dents while he waited for instructions about what he was supposed to do with the Hatches and with the harebrained kid named Jimmy Custis who had ruined a real sweet deal and damaged the property.

The way Kenton explained it at the county jail, he was on his way to steal the car according to prior arrangements when he met it heading down old Highway 49 hell-bent for election, and he turned around to chase it. He figured Billman had decided to renege on the deal and was leaving the country. By the time he got it run off the road and stopped, he realized the driver wasn't Billman and that there were two other people in the car. Out for a trial spin, how about that?

"Jimmy Custis had worked for Kenton before, but he was freelancing that time," Sandy

said to George as he was waiting for the doctor's report on Mr. and Mrs. Hatch. "He really *was* dumb enough to steal a car and sell it the same day, because he wanted money to buy a motorcycle, can you believe that? The guy was only going to hold the cycle for him for that one day. He just wanted a down payment."

"Takes all kinds," George said mildly.

"Yep. But when he saw Sam Kenton standing there he realized what a horrible mistake he'd made—stealing a car Kenton was supposed to get. He started babbling about all the work he'd done for him before, stealing cars for him, and how he didn't mean to steal a car Kenton was supposed to get, and there the Hatches were, listening to the whole thing. Witnesses."

"They going to be okay now?"

"Oh yeah, but still mad. And in no mood at all to buy a car from what I hear. Which is okay by me."

"Me, too. God bless pedestrians, right, Sandy?"

FICTION

My Summer Vacation

by Cal Sharp

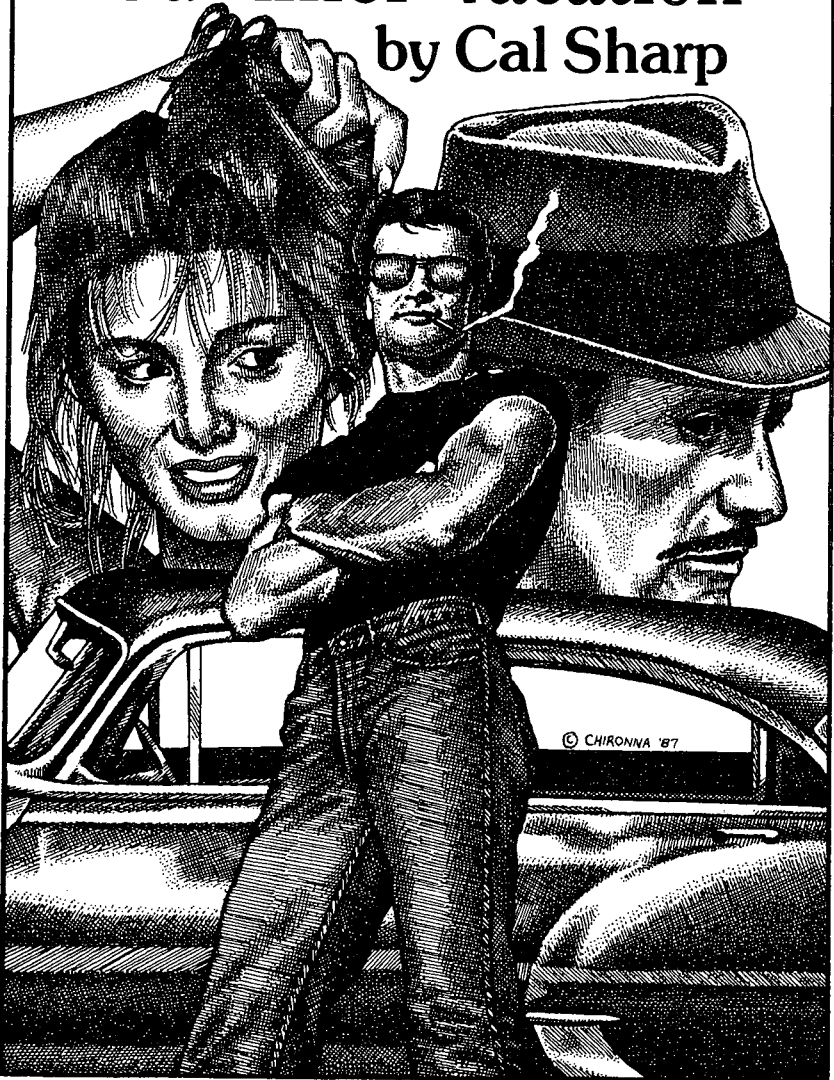


Illustration by Ronald Chironna

25

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I had never seen a dead person before. "She looks so nice," everybody whispered as they filed by the coffin. I hadn't known her when she was alive. To me she just looked pale and cold. And dead. Her name was Brenda Cole, and she had been strangled to death.

It was close and sticky in the little church as the hot summer weather drifted in through the open windows. I tugged at my collar and loosened the clinging, sweaty shirt from my back. About a dozen people had shown up for the service; all friends of Velma Thompson's, the murdered girl's aunt. The body had been sent here from Kentucky because Velma was the decedent's closest living responsible relative. I was here because I was a friend of the decedent's brother, Buddy.

I watched Buddy Cole's face as he looked at his dead sister. His lips were compressed into a tight line and his eyes looked like hard black little rocks. He didn't linger at the coffin, and walked quickly back and sat down next to his aunt, who dabbed at her eyes with a tiny lace hanky.

After the service I caught a ride home with Buddy. He was eighteen, three years older than I.

"Man, that's tough," I said meaninglessly as we got in the

car. What do you say to a guy when his sister's been murdered?

"We didn't get along," he said quickly. "Haven't even seen her in over a year." I think he meant this to sound casual and offhand, but it came out sounding kind of grim.

"Still don't know what happened?"

He loosened his tie and checked his gleaming DA in the rear view mirror. Lighting a cigarette, he turned the key in the ignition and the engine roared to life.

"Nah."

She had been found in a parking lot behind her apartment building in Covington, just across the river, by a delivery man at six in the morning three days ago. She had been strangled and tossed out her third story bedroom window. So far the police had no leads.

Buddy eased the Hurst shifter into first gear and the Chevy started to move.

It was 1963, and I was down from Chicago spending a few weeks with my grandparents, like I did every summer. They lived in a rickety little river town in southwestern Ohio near Cincinnati, next to a refinery that had been built after the Depression. My grandpa worked there, as did most of the people in the town. He was a telegra-

pher, and worked in a tiny white shack in the shadows of the huge, gas-filled spheroids.

Fewer than twelve hundred people lived in the town, which was just a few hilly, treelined streets and alleys clustered around a grocery store, a post office, and a saloon. The stop sign at that busy intersection had to be resurrected on a fairly regular basis, the patrons of the saloon being uncommonly hard on it Saturday nights. The pungent smell of the refinery wafted over the town when the wind blew from the north; when it blew from the south, it brought dust from the nearby gravel pit. In the summertime the little kids ran around in dirty white underpants. One family kept a real lion in a trailer in their back yard.

Buddy had moved there from Kentucky a couple of years ago to stay with his aunt. He'd had a lot of trouble back home; his mother had run off and his father was in the federal prison in Atlanta. Buddy had been arrested on some sort of assault charge, and it had come down to living with his aunt or going to a detention home in Lexington until he was eighteen.

Buddy saved a lot of words—he kept up his end of conversations with a minimum of verbiage—yet he communicated a feeling of tortured rest-

lessness that made you realize that you wouldn't be surprised if you heard tomorrow that he'd killed a man, or left for California, or joined a monastery, or hanged himself. You knew he had problems, but he never really opened up to anyone, and he was generally regarded as a kind of magnificent loner, a la James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause*. He worked at the refinery, too, and went to night school a couple of times a week.

"Well, what did she do? Where did she work?" I asked. I hadn't even known he had a sister until she got killed.

"I dunno. Waitress or something," he answered evasively.

I could tell he didn't want to talk about her, so I let it drop. I didn't want to bug him. But I was sure curious as hell.

"Here y'are, Champ," he said as we drove up in front of my grandparents' white two story house. My name wasn't Champ, but that's what he liked to call me. Grandma and Grandpa were sitting on the front porch looking a little unhappy. Buddy reminded them too much of Elvis.

"Goin' to the dance tonight?" I asked.

He thought for a moment. "Might."

"Well, maybe I'll see ya there." My grandparents didn't think much of my going to the Top Deck, a teen club that held

dances on the weekends. But I had a new tactic that I was going to try tonight to get them to let me go.

"Later," I said, getting out of the car.

"Hey, Champ, uh . . ." he stopped me. "Thanks for comin' to the funeral." He said this softly, looking kind of embarrassed. Then he put his mirrored shades back on and drove off in a swirl of dust, the dual glass packs echoing off the houses.

My cousin Tommy came over later. He was a tall, skinny, blond-haired kid about my age who would laugh at anything. He'd told me once that he'd caught his sister Linda kissing the TV screen when Ricky sang his song at the end of *Ozzie and Harriet*. Tommy had the enviable ability to talk while he belched. He could pronounce whole words and even short sentences and you could understand exactly what he said. He could say the alphabet like that all the way to "S."

Tommy was with me the day I met Sherry Myer, who lived just down the street. Tommy and I had been swimming at the creek and Buddy had given us a ride home. I'd seen Sherry around, but she had never really noticed me until she saw me riding in Buddy's '57 Chevy

with my arm hanging out the window and a Pall Mall stuck behind my ear.

I immediately fell in love with her. She had a soft, tanned, long-legged body and teased blonde hair and was a dancing fool. She'd been on the local version of *American Bandstand* doing the twist and the watusi and all the rest. Besides dancing, her main interests in life were angora sweaters and Troy Donahue (aka Merle Johnson, Jr.). She was no magna cum laude, but she was sweet and hip, and I wasn't looking to discuss existentialism or the theory of relativity.

She liked to keep me in a state of confusion and frustration; after all, she had an older sister to teach her these womanly wiles, and she was a year older than I. But she liked me, though I wasn't supposed to know. I did know, however, and it helped even things out.

We got passionate with each other a few times after dark in Tommy's back yard, but so far nothing to brag about. Close, but no cigar, as they say. Not that I would brag about it . . . I might hint a little to Buddy. She had pouty Brigitte Bardot lips flavored with strawberry frost lipstick, and deep blue eyes that could jump-start my uncle's pacemaker.

"What's goin' on?" Tommy

said, dragging his bony self up the front porch steps. He didn't have a lot of energy, and did everything at half pace.

"Just got back from the funeral." I was a little depressed. I would see that dead face for weeks.

"So what's the deal? They catch the guy or what?" he asked, stuffing some Fleer into his face.

"I guess not."

"Where's Perry Mason when ya really need him?"

I changed clothes and we went out to the back porch to resume work on a Visible V-8 we were building.

"Wow, looka that! Crazy!" Tommy whispered excitedly, grabbing my arm.

Reba Davis, Buddy's girlfriend, lived next door. There she was, out in the back yard on a huge pink towel in a tiny yellow bikini sipping lemonade and listening to a portable radio. Her long auburn hair was tied back, and her flawless tawny skin glistened with sweat and oil in the glare of the sun. She was a girl who knew how to wear a tan.

The Davises were a motley group of in-laws and step-relations who always had an old car or two jacked up in the back yard and who kept the washing machine on the front porch. Ol' Man Davis, Reba's stepfather,

was a sloppy, loudmouthed, burr-headed guy of about fifty with a beer belly sagging out from underneath a dirty white undershirt. He chewed tobacco and drank a lot at the saloon down the street. His fat wife, who wore her greasy hair tied up in a bun, drank a lot with him. Their kids swarmed all around the neighborhood, and word was that they lived mainly on Coke and potato chips.

Ol' Man Davis was just back from the Ohio State Prison, where he'd done a year for auto theft. Once a month he rattled into Cincy to yap with his parole officer. He drove a garbage truck part time, but only until a more suitable form of employment came along. That would be about the time the Cubs won another pennant.

Reba seemed different, though. She was bright, always freshly scrubbed, and had apparently just been unlucky when it came to parents. My grandparents liked her; she was always polite, helpful, and cheerful, and that's the way children should be. They felt sorry for her, having to do most of the work around the house, taking care of the kids, and putting up with her parents' drinking.

She was also the local beauty, and every guy around was after her, although they trod pretty

softly when Buddy was nearby. He was known to be a bad motor scooter with a bad temper, as a few guys with spaces in their smiles could testify.

Ol' Man Davis hated Buddy. And feared him. They'd had a confrontation or two, and he wouldn't allow Buddy on the property. Maybe he was afraid he would marry Reba and take away the only member of his household who did any work.

The Davises had chronic money troubles, and Reba helped out with her babysitting money and the proceeds from some kind of little part-time job she had. She was about Buddy's age and would be a senior in the fall if she returned to school.

Tommy and I were working on the carburetor when Grandma called from the kitchen: "Honey, we need a few things for dinner. Would you run down to Woody's for me?" She handed me a five and we set off for the grocery store, three blocks down the street.

There was a brand new Lincoln Continental parked in front of Woody's. A big black job with the windows tinted so you couldn't see inside. The town looked smaller and rattier beside the burnished metal marvel from Detroit.

Inside the store a tall, thin man with a pencil mustache, dressed in a tailored suit with

a lavender silk tie, was buying a pack of Camels from Woody. I saw a thick wad of bills that he flashed briefly. He had close-set flinty eyes that flicked over us quickly when we walked in.

"Y'know a guy named Davis?" he was asking Woody. He sounded like Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront*.

"Yeah, Davises live right down on Front Street, white house with two stumps in the front yard," Woody answered, pointing. "What do ya . . ."

"Thanks," he cut Woody off, and walked out in a swirl of aftershave. I noticed he had a slight limp. He got into the Lincoln on the passenger side; he evidently had a driver. I carried my stuff to the counter and we all watched the big car purr away.

"Who was that, somebody from *The Untouchables*?" I asked.

"That was Vito Siri," Woody whispered reverently.

"Vito Siri? The big criminal?" I said excitedly. I'd heard of him.

"I wouldn't say that too loud," Woody said.

"Well, he's a gambler, anyway."

"Among other things."

The "other things" included drugs, prostitution, extortion, and who knows what else. At least that's what I had always

heard. He was supposed to have a lot of big time political connections and he ran a nightclub across the river in Kentucky where a lot of acts from Vegas appeared.

When we got home the Lincoln was parked in front of Davis's. About ten minutes later Siri limped out and drove off.

After dinner I began a new assault on my grandparents. The Top Deck was in a neighboring town about three miles away. Tommy went all the time, and I figured if I got his dad, who was my grandma's son-in-law, to intercede in my behalf it might help. This time my grandparents grudgingly gave in, and at eight thirty Tommy and I were crammed into the dark low-ceilinged club sipping Cokes and digging on "Louie, Louie."

A gaggle of girls was crushed together in front of the bandstand drooling over the musicians. Dancers took up the middle of the place, and guys like Tommy and me circled the festivities, eyeing the leg and trying to look cool.

Sherry showed up later with her older sister Pam and some girlfriends. At the end of the night, when the band played "Cherry Pie," it was Sherry and me in a sweaty clutch dancing the last dance in a shadowy cor-

ner. A squeeze here, nibble there, then she was gone in a roiling of galvanized pubescent hormones. Her mother had come to pick them up.

Buddy had shown up just before the band quit. He was alone. He looked a little drunk.

"So, where's the ol' lady?" I asked, meaning Reba.

"Babysitting for Candy," he said. Candy was Reba's sister.

"Ahh, so you're out checkin' the traps, huh?" I said, laughing.

"Sure," he said sarcastically, leaning against the wall and looking the place over. A knot of girls across the floor were staring at us and giggling. I don't mean at us; I mean at him. He showed no interest. He just dragged on his cigarette and patted a booted foot in time with "Blueberry Hill."

He gave Tommy and me a ride home. He drove carefully, sipping a beer, and kept the music going on the radio, changing stations when a commercial came on. His face was granite-like in the glare of the oncoming headlights. He didn't say anything. Tommy and I talked a little in subdued voices.

We dropped Tommy off and then pulled into my grandparents' driveway. He cut the engine, got out two more Hudepohls, gave me one, and lit a smoke.

"Cops called tonight. They caught the guy," he said in a flat voice.

"Good deal," I said, surprised.

"What happened was . . ." he paused, "she was . . ." he had to force the next word out: "hooking. For that Vito Siri guy, over in Covington."

"God, Buddy." What a rotten thing.

"And some 'customer' killed her. One of the other girls saw him. Truck driver from Florida." His voice was hard and bitter. He washed the words out of his mouth with a long drink of beer.

"Why?" I asked, shocked.

"I don' know. No reason . . ."

A car drove by, breaking the stillness of the night. I could see the edge of the moon creeping over the tops of the trees. The bathroom light came on in my grandparents' dark house.

"God, I'm really sorry, man," I said uselessly. I didn't have a sister; I tried to imagine how I would feel if Sherry, say, had been doing something like that.

His face looked drawn and old in the pale moonlight. He stared straight ahead, not looking at me, and spoke in a far-away voice: "I caught her doin' that shit back home. I broke her jaw and put a guy in the hospital for three months."

"That's when you moved here?"

"So it's just as well," he continued like I wasn't there. "I told her I'd kill her if I ever caught her doin' it again." His big fists gripped the steering wheel like vises and his breath came hard. "She took after her mother," he said dreamily.

"Your mother was a . . ."

The porch light flipped on and off a couple of times. I had to go. When I opened the door and the dome light came on I could see tears on his cheeks.

I heard about the robbery the next morning at breakfast. Josephine Cowan, who worked at the post office, had told Grandma about it over the back yard fence. Somebody had knocked Ev Emerson, who owned the saloon next to Woody's, over the head and made off with over a thousand dollars, and probably a lot more, as Emerson was known to be a gambler who placed bets for some of the locals on horseraces across the river in Kentucky, and there was no telling how much more money he had lying around that he would be disinclined to report.

Emerson had seen nothing; heard nothing. He had just sent the waitress home and was all alone counting up the day's receipts when he was struck on the head from behind with the five ball from his pool table.

The robber must have been hiding in the supply room when he locked up, he figured, and escaped through the back door. The police had found no clues. Emerson had been taken to the hospital, treated, and released.

I was too excited to finish my eggs, and ran across the street to tell Tommy about it. He was watching cartoons, as usual on a Saturday morning.

"Hey, Tom! Didya hear?" I hollered in his ear. I turned the sound down and we discussed the case.

Who could have done it? Who needed money that badly? This was the first major crime in our town since nobody could remember when. My grandparents were one of the few families who even locked their doors at night. Maybe it was some gambling associate of Emerson's. Could Vito Siri have anything to do with it? Maybe Emerson faked the robbery for insurance purposes. All sorts of possibilities occurred to us.

Later that day some additional exciting news, albeit of a different nature, came to our attention via Sherry's little brother, the pesky but sometimes useful Theodore.

"I know something," the freckle-faced eight-year-old chirped at me as I stood waiting my turn at bat. We had a game of batter-up going on in the

schoolyard behind my grandparents' house.

"Good for you," I said.

"Somethin' 'bout Sherry," he said.

Now what? "What *do* you know?" I asked, taking the bait.

"What she's doin' tonight."

"What *is* she doin' tonight?"

"Somethin' special."

It was my turn at bat. I flied out to deep left. I was a dead pull hitter.

"So what's so special?" I continued our little game.

"Somethin' special at our house tonight."

We continued in this vein until I had wormed the story out of the cunning little beggar. It only cost me a couple of baseball cards and a quarter.

Seems that Sherry was having a slumber party that night. Visions of nubile pajama-clad teenagers salivating to Ricky Nelson records danced through my head. Slumber, of course, would be the last thing on their little minds. Maybe Tommy and I should stop by to say hello and wish them a good night's sleep.

That evening after watching *Hootenanny* Tommy and I were sitting on my front porch listening to the Angels sing "My Boyfriend's Back" on WSAI and making our plans for later that night when Vito Siri's big Lincoln glided up next door, in

front of the Davises'. Reba, who'd been sitting on the front porch, hopped up and ran inside. Vito got out, looking around suspiciously. Tonight he had on a dark suit, pinstriped, with a black shirt and a white tie. I thought I'd seen that outfit in *West Side Story*. His black hair, combed straight back, gleamed sleekly in the Davises' porch light as he knocked on the door, waited a moment, and limped inside.

Vito's driver, a lank, dark bird, got out, began wrecking a cigarette, and lounged carelessly against the fender of the Lincoln. He looked around disdainfully, squinting through the cigarette smoke, and adjusted the chauffeur's cap perched atop his greasy pompadour.

We heard a distant rumble, and then Buddy's car came into view, cruising slowly down the street like a king touring his kingdom, chrome glinting under the streetlights. What a fine ride it was. He had a 409 in it and turned in the high twelves in B Modified Stock class at nearby Edgewater drag strip. I usually went with him and helped get it ready to run; I was pretty good with a wrench and I liked to think that I was at least partially responsible for the shelf full of trophies he had at home. That was how I'd first met Buddy. I'd been hang-

ing around in the pit—my great-aunt cooked hamburgers at the concession stand and would get me in for free—and when he had needed a hand with his headers I was right there. I liked to work on cars.

"Buddy-boy, what's goin' on," the chauffeur said around his cigarette, his nose in the air, as Buddy parked the Chevy and got out.

"Lanny," Buddy drawled, producing a comb and running it through his hair.

I couldn't hear the rest of their conversation, and I was sorry about that because it began to look interesting. Whatever it was that Lanny had said had made a real strong impression on Buddy; his face got red and his fists got clenched. Lanny looked like a guy about to get one across the chops, and he looked plenty relieved when Vito came back out. Flipping his butt, he scooted inside the car.

After they drove off Reba reappeared on the porch. Her tan stood out vividly against her sleeveless white blouse and her hair hung loose. A hairy arm reached out from inside the house and the meaty hand on the end of it grabbed her arm and jerked her back inside. She yelped and Buddy took off like a shot up the short sidewalk, onto the porch, and into the

house, Tommy and I fell over each other jumping off the porch to get a better look.

We heard swearing and a crash and then Reba ran back out onto the porch. Her blouse was torn and we ogled the black bra she had on underneath it. Her hand was pressed against her mouth and her eyes were wide with fear.

The ol' man was no match for the enraged, bull-like Buddy, of course, and seconds later Buddy emerged, his face grim and forbidding, with the ol' man in a hammer lock. Spittle and blood ran down the ol' man's chin and he cursed and struggled futilely in Buddy's iron grip. With one hand on the back of the ol' man's head, Buddy forced him down to the wooden floor of the porch. His legs splayed out behind him as he tried to squirm away, but Buddy's strength was too much for him. Reba stood up against the porch railing, petrified with fright, as her stepfather's face was forced to her feet and his bloody lips were smeared across her shoes. Buddy had made him kiss her feet.

Buddy held the ol' man in this pose of abasement long enough to get the point across. He finally let him up and he and Reba went inside. They came back out in a couple of minutes, Reba clad in a fresh blouse and shoes, stepped over

the ol' man, got in the Chevy, and roared away in a squeal of tires.

In a little while the ol' man dragged himself up and went inside. Then Grandma hooted at me to come in.

"Gotta go. See ya in a little while," I said.

At ten thirty that night, after making sure my grandparents were tucked in for the night, I crept out of my bedroom window onto the roof of the porch and shinnied down to the ground. Tommy was waiting for me. He had gotten out okay, too. We slunk through the alley past the lion and across the street and over the fence into Sherry's back yard. Her bedroom was on the first floor. (How I knew that is another story.)

Her window was open; the night was warm, and we could hear giggling and music. I peeked in. The curtains were parted an eighth of an inch and I saw a flash of an arm; then some hair; then someone walked across the room. Tommy nudged me aside and took a look.

"Can't see anything," he breathed.

"Let's say hi," I said, and tapped lightly, hoping there were no parents in the room. The giggling and the music

stopped. The curtains parted a little and a blue eye peered out.

"Hi," I said brightly.

"You . . ." Sherry began furiously, after swallowing her gum.

"Whatcha girls up to?" I asked innocently.

" . . . scared me to death. What are you doing here?"

"Came over to say hi," I said.

The other girls crowded around to see what was going on. They were in various states of déshabille and were a conspicuous sight to behold.

"Hey, girls," I said, leering, and Sherry gave me a dirty look.

We all flirted and tried to be witty for a while.

Boy: "Hey, I like that camel hair sweater."

Girl: "Camel hair sweater?"

Boy: "Yeah, it's still got the humps in it."

In a little while we saw Buddy drive past with Reba, turn down the alley, and disappear through the gate into her back yard. It was inky black back there, unlit, with two huge oak trees that kept out any stray light from the streetlights. A good place for a goodnight kiss. A few minutes later Reba's bedroom light came on and we heard Buddy drive away down the alley.

Sherry and I decided to go for a walk, and she scrambled out the window and off we went. I

knew a secret little spot behind the high school that had always seemed romantic enough.

"I can't be gone long," she said. Boy, she smelled good.

"This won't take long," I said, leering some more.

"That's what I was afraid of," she said. So here I am, stuck with a smart-ass.

When the moon came up her blue eyes danced in its light. Her breath on my face was sweet and her satin skin was hot under my hands. She told me she loved me, and maybe she did. I returned the compliment.

Later, after walking Sherry home, I saw Ol' Man Davis's rusty, beat-up wood-paneled station wagon pull out of his back yard and drive off. It was after midnight. Where could he be going?

Reba Davis was murdered that night. Two kids out fishing found her body early Sunday morning face-down in some tall weeds at the river's edge in an old unused area of the gravel pit. She had been strangled.

The gravel pit was on the river road on the outskirts of town. Tommy and I ran over there as soon as we heard about it. They had already taken the body away, but police were still there conducting the investigation, and we stood outside the

roped off area with the crowd that had gathered and watched them take photos and make plaster casts of tire prints in the soft dirt road that led back to the secluded area where the body had been found. A TV crew from Cincy was there with a camera and a reporter I had seen on the evening news.

The whole place had a forbidding atmosphere; the low-hanging trees made it dark and shadowy, the nearby river gave it a fishy mephitic, and the rutted dirt road edged with beer cans and other trash made it look like a dump. Tommy and I talked in small tones of the girl we had known.

As we stood there it began to get cloudy. The wind picked up and the afternoon turned dark. Soon, huge drops of rain were falling, and I ran home to sit on the back porch and moodily watch the storm.

A couple of detectives went up and down the street asking questions. A guy who looked just like Stuart Bailey had our side of the street. He was dressed in a worn brown suit that looked incongruous with his perfectly combed shiny hair. His name was Chapman. When I told him my story, he stroked his chin and looked thoughtful.

"What were you doing out that late?" he asked.

"Crashing a slumber party," I said, hoping my little transgression would be overlooked in all the excitement. I didn't say anything about the walk I took with Sherry.

"Are you certain Miss Davis was in the car when Mr. Cole drove into the Davises' back yard?"

"Positive. There's a street-light almost in front of Davis's house and I could see her when they drove past."

"And what time was this?"

"Oh, about eleven thirty, I guess."

"What direction did Mr. Davis go when you saw him drive off?"

"South." The direction of the gravel pit.

The robbery at the saloon was cleared up when the cops questioned Buddy. Reba had told him, on their date Saturday night, that her stepfather had done it. He needed money in a hurry to cover some gambling debts. Vito Siri held the markers, and she had overheard him threatening him Friday afternoon at the house when she had come in from sunbathing. Davis had promised to have the money the next day, and Siri said he'd be back for it then.

Reba had gotten home about one Friday night, or Saturday morning, from her sister's,

Buddy said. The house was empty; her mother was away with the kids visiting in Louisville for the weekend and her stepfather was out. Nervous in the lonely house, she had not slept well, and had awakened about three when she thought she heard a noise. She got up to look around and had seen her stepfather stuffing a wad of bills in a dresser drawer. The next day when she heard about the robbery she knew where the money had come from. They had been arguing about it shortly before Vito had come to collect, and that had led to the fight on the porch.

He and Reba had been to see *Beach Party*, with Frankie Avalon and Annette, on their date Saturday night, he said, and when he had brought her home he had gone inside with her, but the ol' man was asleep, drunk, and so he had gone on home, thinking that everything would be okay.

So, on the strength of (1) my story and (2) tire tracks at the gravel pit matching the tires on the ol' man's car, he was arrested for Reba's murder.

A pall settled over the town after the horror of the weekend. The rain continued off and on and the murder was discussed over the party line telephone sys-

tem, at Woody's, at the saloon, and over back yard fences. I heard Buddy's name mentioned more than once; the previous maledictions against his character were forgotten and he had become the reluctant recipient of the town's collective sympathy. Ol' Man Davis had never been a real popular member of the community, and everyone had sort of an "I told you so" attitude about him, like they all figured he'd end up like this. In another place and another time they might have gotten a rope and stretched his neck a little.

The public defender convinced Davis to tell the whole story, and, frightened of the murder rap, he admitted robbing the saloon. Yeah, he needed the money to fix things up with Siri, and yeah, Reba had caught on to his act, but no way, José, he hadn't iced her. Why should he? She wouldn't rat on him. He'd loved her, and she'd loved him. He said this with a big crocodile tear in his eye, but nobody believed him.

He said that on the night she was killed he had drunk a bottle of Old Forester and gone to bed about eleven. He'd been in bed all night and hadn't had the car out.

He stuck to this story like an honor student to a curfew. He had no idea who'd killed her.

Who would want to? Who had a motive?

Only he.

Buddy had been lying pretty low, and I finally saw him again late Tuesday afternoon. The rain had finally stopped and I was walking home from the post office. He pulled up next to me in the blue Chevy.

"How 'bout a ride," he said.

"Sure," I said, glad to see him. He looked tired; there were dark circles under his eyes and his hair was awry. He had on an old greasy T-shirt and he chewed on a toothpick while he smoked.

"Heard what you told the cops, Champ," he said in a hoarse voice. "Glad you were out and about."

News came on the radio and he punched a button and "Candy Girl" came on. He sighed and changed the station again.

"I didn't tell the whole story, though," I said, grinning. Maybe this would cheer him up a little, I thought. I told him the rest of the story, expecting him to laugh and hit me in the shoulder or something. But he didn't say anything until he had pulled out another cigarette and lit it. "Surf City" came on.

"That's all you saw?" he asked, his voice serious.

"Yeah, after I saw the ol' man drive off I went to bed." We

pulled up at my house.

"Hey," he said, grinning faintly. "I'm goin' into Cincy tomorrow to pick up some parts for the Studie." He had a '53 Studebaker he was rebuilding. "Wanna ride in with me?"

"Sure," I said enthusiastically. That would be a good lick; he liked working on the Studebaker.

I never went for that ride with Buddy. He was killed that night at the Ace in the Hole, Vito Siri's nightclub in Covington.

He'd walked into the club about ten o'clock and asked the bartender where Vito was. The bartender waved his hand toward Vito's office in the back and Buddy kicked in the locked door, pulled a .38 from under his leather jacket, and shot Siri twice in the chest before his surprised bodyguard could draw his weapon and shoot. Siri slumped lifelessly on the stacks of money he'd been counting at his desk, turning the green to a dark, ugly color with his red blood. Buddy fell, dead, to the floor with a bullet in his brain. He hadn't said a word.

Everyone knew that Siri had armed bodyguards. Siri usually went armed himself. It didn't make sense. Buddy must have known he couldn't get away with it. It was a heavy price to

pay to avenge his sister's death, but maybe Buddy didn't care any more.

I had to come back from Chicago when the trial was held. The good part about that was that I got to see Sherry again.

Ol' Man Davis looked haggard and old sitting in the courtroom. He'd lost weight in jail, and his grey jail clothes hung loosely on his shrunken frame. They said he had cirrhosis, and he stared at us with watery eyes when we took the stand and told our story. He'd had an attack of religion in jail, too, and when the foreman of the jury read off "Guilty," he began quoting from the Bible and protesting that he was as innocent "as a newborn lamb." Convicted of the robbery of the saloon and the murder of his stepdaughter, he'd be away for a while, though he didn't look like he would last too long.

There turned out to be a hitch in the Brenda Cole investigation. The star witness had changed her story a little. All she had really seen was the truck driver from Florida leaving Brenda's room, and as the time of death was established as about two hours later, and the truck driver was in Indianapolis then, with witnesses, the whole case fell apart; the cops were back to square one.

This was Friday, and I was flying back home Sunday. Sherry had a little do at her house Saturday, and Tommy and I went. Coke, potato chips, records, that sort of excitement. Some kids from her school were there, and her older sister Pam showed up later with her new boyfriend, a dark-haired guy in an expensive three-quarter length black leather coat. I'd seen him before. He was Vito Siri's chauffeur, Lanny. I wondered if he'd found another job yet. He was about twenty-two, I guess, and looked like he thought he was pretty important. He nibbled on a small silver flask that he had hidden away in the leather coat.

We talked and laughed and danced, and tried to convince ourselves that we were having a great time, but the laughs were hollow, the dancing mechanical, and we finally just sat around and talked about Buddy and Reba.

Lanny and I were the last to leave; we sat at opposite ends of the sofa with our girls between us after everyone else had gone. Lanny was getting pretty drunk by this time and had been dominating the conversation for the last half hour, trying to impress everyone but mainly succeeding only in clearing the house. I was ready to go myself, and was about to

suggest to Sherry that we . . .

"Lishen, I'll tell ya sumpin' dint come out at the trial," he said in his strident voice.

"What, Lanny?" said Pam, sounding bored. She had been exchanging looks with Sherry that said "How do I get rid of this weasel?"

"Reba was workin' for Vito. She was." He accentuated this pronouncement with a sharp downward jerk of his head.

"What?" we all said in unison, incredulously.

"Yeah, one, two nights a week."

"Doing what?" Pam asked.

"Hookin', what else?" He smiled smugly and took another pull at his flask. "I recognized her on the porch when I drove Vito over there that Saturday."

Reba a hooker? I couldn't believe it. I wanted to smash his face in. Pam and Sherry stared at him in disbelief. He looked back drunkenly at us and a worried expression crossed his face.

"Vito didn't want it to get out, y'know? Her family an' all that. Don't tell no one I tol' ya." His smug bravado had vanished when he realized he'd been talking too much.

"Lanny, did Buddy know that?" I asked through numb lips.

"Yeah, he knew. I said some-

thin' about it to him. He got pretty red-neck about it, too." Lanny stopped to belch. "Thought I might have to take him down. Heh, heh. I figured he already knew."

I thought about it long and hard, and by the time I got to O'Hare I had it figured out.

Buddy's mother, who had deserted him, had been a prostitute. When he'd caught his sister doing the same thing, he'd broken her jaw in rage and frustration. And when he found out about his girlfriend doing it, too, it had just been too much, and he'd killed her. Vito Siri was the symbol, and the cause, of much of Buddy's frustration, and when he shot him, mindless of the consequences, it was a reprisal against all the disappointment and rejection he'd known in his short life.

But I had seen him bring Reba home that Saturday night.

What I had seen was Reba's dead body, propped up in the seat. He knew his car would be heard, and he hoped someone would look out and see him bringing her safely home. That someone was me. Then he went in the house, found the ol' man passed out, as usual on a Saturday night, got the keys to his station wagon, and put Reba's body in it. Then he drove his own car away and parked it

nearby, walked back and drove Reba's body to the gravel pit, brought the station wagon back to Davis's, and walked back to his Chevy.

I seemed to be the only one who knew that (1) Reba was hooking and (2) the effect that might have on Buddy. I thought this over for a couple of days. Should I tell the police what I knew? But what *did* I know? That Buddy killed Reba? I had no proof. The look on his face and the sound of his voice in his car in my grandparents' driveway the night he brought me home from the Top Deck was no proof. Reba had been a good girl who had been coerced or driven, for whatever reasons, into doing what she did, and no good could come of raking it up. Pam and Sherry wouldn't spread it around; they had liked Reba too much. And Lanny was too scared

of Vito's organization to talk much. The ol' man would be doing time anyhow, on the robbery conviction.

That was the last summer I spent down there. Grandpa died that winter and Grandma came to live with us in Chicago. Tommy grew up to be a forest ranger, and I never saw Sherry again. The last I heard, she had gone to L.A. The ol' man died in prison after doing about a year.

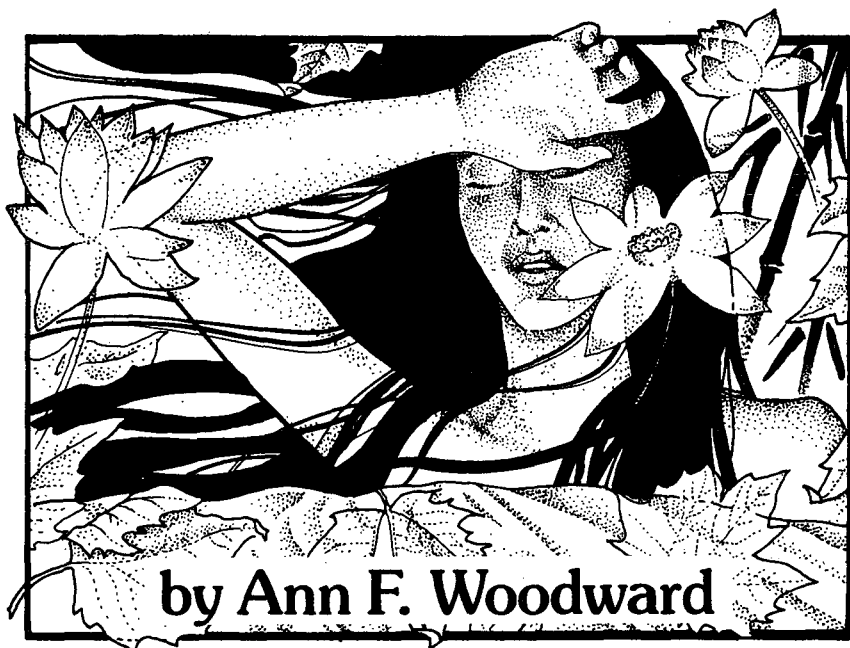
I never felt any qualms about not talking, but one thing has bothered me all these years. Who killed Brenda Cole? Vito was a pretty mean customer, capable of murder. He might have had a reason. Maybe Lanny. But he was too much of a wimp. Some anonymous customer of Brenda's? Maybe. I don't know. I guess Buddy must have done it.

(Continued from page 2.)

MacDonald, but word has arrived in our offices of a publication that sounds as if it would interest McGee fans. We haven't seen it ourselves, but we're told that it's a new edition, revised and updated, of a "Special Confidential Report" prepared by McGee experts Jean and Walter Shine. "Entries in this definitive dossier range from specifications of McGee's houseboat, the *Busted Flush*, to

McGee's employment background, distinguishing scars, personality profile, and artistic preferences." Specifications: 5¼" × 8½"; 32 pages long; \$3 per copy. Checks, which must accompany orders, should be made payable to The Florida Center for the Book, and orders should likewise be addressed to The Florida Center for the Book at 100 South Andrews Avenue, Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33001. Proceeds benefit the Center.

The Theft of the Fire Pearl



The Lady Aoi sat in her swaying palanquin and did not even look out as they ascended at last into the mountains. She could feel the change in temperature but she did not open her curtains to see the straight trunks of immense

height, the ranked tips of the cedars of the forest that she knew to be there. The plain behind them would be visible now and then from a turn in the path, a smoky river-lit brocade of yellow fields and forests of russet and green, with farthest

away, felt rather than seen, the murk and jumble of the city. All this lay under a sky so blue that the very purity and dazzle of light had become the most hateful thing in this hateful, perfect, interminable autumn of disease and calamity.

It was as if, this year, the seasons had become shuffled into displaced sections. Part of the summer had been frigid, stormy, and wet, and now, in the middle of the Tenth Month when cool air and fall rains should have begun, there were days and days of sun and warmth. The floods of two months ago, disastrous in the southeastern section of the city, had led to an epidemic of fever; the present lack of rain, to fires in every quarter.

As if provoked by the abnormal season, gangs of thieves and runaway farmers from the western section of the city and bands of armed priests from the mountains came even to the palace walls. The priests had attacked and injured the old Major Controller of the Left, who would not allow them to absorb any more neighboring farms into their temple's tax-free estates. Even the empress' quarters had been broken into, robes and an antique lute had been stolen and one of her ladies struck. The palace guards and the police, always reluc-

tant to go much to the west of the central avenue, would not now go out at all except in groups of twelve or fifteen mounted men.

Aoi had come to think that the capital, that most brilliant of cities, was the dreariest place in all Japan. Nothing could beguile her, not maples with tiny scarlet leaves, not showers of gold from willows, or reflections of the moon in the garden pond. She saw only the pall of smoke from funeral pyres, the bolted gates of the princess' house, where no visitors came because all other gates were bolted too. People were afraid.

The clear sky frightened them, each day's luminous dawn and blue afternoon. Death was too frequent, stealing away close friends days before the news of it came by letter, riddling the highest and lowest ranks of government. Scandals among officials, riots in the provinces seemed to be reported every day.

Many thought that all this was proof of a loss of moral strength that signaled the era of the Latter End of the Law, when the power of the teachings of Buddha would wane and man would enter a time of decadence. Aoi, gloomy in her shadowed, tilting seat, thought it ironic that such perfection of the physical world should have

come to symbolize foreboding.

She and all others in the house of the princess she served, dreading the fever, soul-weary from tension and trouble, had decided to escape. The other ladies-in-waiting had gone with their mistress to stay in Nara, where her father owned a large house. Only Aoi was making a real journey.

It had taken her five days of riding in a carriage to reach the village at the foot of the mountains where one changed to foot conveyance. Last night she and her attendants had slept in the house of the village headman, who had supplied the palanquin and men to carry it. Crossing the river this morning, they had seen cart wheels set into the water on either side of the bridge. Many carriages waited in the village for owners who were up on the mountain in the famous temples, and to keep them from drying out, the wheels were taken off and put in the river until time to go back to the city.

Women were not allowed in the main temples or even on their grounds; in this one place they were thought to be a polluting influence. Aoi had been invited to visit a nobleman friend and his wife, who had built a house below the temple grounds and lived a quiet country life in the summers. Here

at the Latter End of the Law, Aoi thought that a little simplicity and a lot of nature would be healing. She moved aside one corner of the curtain. The air was scented. Sitting up, using the end of her fan, she opened the curtain wider and looked out.

The path here was so steep that the men could take only five or six steps before turning again onto a new twist upward. On these turns, the palanquin seemed to hang over space and Aoi saw only the tops of trees under her. Shuddering, she drew back and sat very still. She had no courage today for contemplating any kind of void.

In mid-afternoon they arrived. The house was set on a shelf of the mountain's slope that was wide enough for a courtyard, a narrow garden, and several buildings. Aoi, stepping out, felt rewarded for the great distance she had come. It was like another world where she breathed another air. Turning first toward the mountain and her waiting host, she saw that, in harmony with the space, every proportion was reduced in scale. Pillars were slimmer and shorter, steps less broad, walls less thick, roofs smaller but seeming heavier. The house was compact, not spread into wings and galleries. Every angle, every texture, and material

pleased her. Tardy in raising her fan, she hoped that her pleasure had been seen.

He had come himself to greet her and stood at the top of the steps while servants bobbed shyly around her, taking boxes from the backs of the village men, adjusting and brushing her robes, poking about inside the palanquin to be sure nothing was left. He had been a close friend of her father's and she had always called him Uncle. Seeing him now, stout, smiling, waiting with affection for her presence in his house, she felt her spirit expand and she thought to herself how shriveling it had been to live through this autumn. Her skin was cool, her silk robes slid and caressed as she moved toward him.

He stopped her with a "tch, tch" admonition of his lips, indicating that she should turn and see the view. From here she saw both distance and height. A fold of the mountain soared up to the right, dense with trees, massive against the sky. In front of her, lesser mountains terraced with rice fields gave way to patched and folded hills stretching to the hazy edges of the world.

Turning back, she smiled at him, "Yes, Uncle, yes," and he nodded, accepting the compliment to his wisdom in choosing

to live part of his life with such splendor. He led her inside.

"Oi!" he called into the serene shadows of the house. No answer came. "The old woman is out back in the kitchen," he said. "She likes to stir the pickle and fluff the rice herself when we are here." Aoi had never heard him joke in just this way, but she had never seen him in the country before.

Shuffling off their shoes, they stepped up onto a dark and shiny floor of wide boards. Aoi, looking for solidity and strength, felt the upthrust mass of the mountain through the tight joints that had not the least give or hint of creaking. In the middle of the room he stopped, seeming discomfited that his wife had not come and uncertain what to do with Aoi. Asking her to sit, he bent down, puffing slightly, to straighten a cushion for her beside the hearth-pit, then went off calling toward the back of the house.

The open firepit was a rustic novelty for Aoi. A few short logs of charcoal, artfully propped together, glowed on a white bed of sand, and while she waited, she watched the shifting glow and flare within the red-hot wood, every cracking segment illuminated. She felt already utterly at peace. She could hear them coming.

"... thought you'd be up there

at the hut, as usual. It's been a long time since we saw much of you after midday, you old fool." Aunt had a carrying voice; he stopped her with a furious, "Sh!" Something in Aoi collapsed.

Stouter than her husband, looking now like a country woman, with her sleeves tied up and her hair untidy around her face, Aunt gave a shout of welcome when she saw Aoi, advancing with billows and breastings to kneel beside her. "How long it has been since we have seen you! We thought maybe you'd married again and been taken off to the provinces."

Her face was perfectly round and flat, except for a snub nose. The flattened quality of her mouth and eyes gave her a comical appearance even when she was not playing broadly, as now. Daughter of a prince, she had been a good match for her husband, but people had laughed behind their fans. She had been raised in Kyushu, where her father had been exiled for years, and she had always had this country air about her and had never cared enough for court society to try to change it. Even so, Uncle had been surprisingly constant. Rising in the government, capable, affable, and interested, he had apparently been happy in all

aspects of his life and was known for his few adventures with other women. The affection between these two had been one of the rocks of Aoi's early life.

Aunt fussed and laughed, taking Aoi to a guest room behind the main hall, introducing her to Jiju, a village girl who would serve her, sending for persimmons and cool water, explaining that the water came from a well so deep, was so pure and cold, that it was better than wine. Then she left her to rest and said that Jiju would take her to the steam room if she cared to bathe. "You'll meet our other visitor, she's up on the mountain now," Aunt said as she prepared to rise.

"Oh?"

"She has a vow to make one thousand copies of the Keron Sutra. He said," her mouth twisted, "she could stay here. There's a hut up there," she flung out one hand, pointing, "and she uses that. She's very pious, she spends all her time there." She laughed but Aoi did not understand the joke. Looking at her, Aunt nodded. "You'll see."

"But who is she?"

"Ah. Well. She's the one they used to call Wakagimi, the young princess, his majesty's favorite. You probably know her already. She's a nun now." Aunt laughed again.

Aoi knew the story of Wakagimi, though she had never actually met her. Raised by the emperor after her father's death, Wakagimi had grown up in the palace and, when she had matured, was made a royal concubine. Many had criticized the emperor for that but he had been immovable. It was said that his passion for her had encouraged her into similar indulgences, and there had been rumors of her many indiscretions with other men. The emperor had tolerated everything, admonishing, raging, sorrowing, but never sending her away. Then she had gone too far and received visits from the emperor's brother, who had been a rival for the throne and who now pressed the emperor to resign in favor of the brother's son. It had been a great scandal when finally she was told not to come again to the palace. She had done the only thing left to her and entered religion.

"It will be interesting to meet her, Aunt. But most of all, it's wonderful to see you both again."

This brought tears to Aunt's eyes and Aoi watched in amazement as she fumbled in the front of her robe for a paper tissue, sniffing and laughing at the same time.

"Ah, child. You've come from the city with all those terrible

goings on, and here . . ." Taking a deep breath, she brought back her smiles and moved to the doorway. "He has a special surprise for you. Something wonderful to show you. Rest now, have a bath. Afterward we will meet again."

Jiju was a small girl with an abundance of thick hair. She spoke in the high-pitched voice and with the precise, countrified politeness that was typical for women on this mountain. Arranging Aoi's few boxes and bundles in a row against the end wall of the room, she asked if she would like to change clothes. Finding a fresh underrobe, Aoi gave it to her to carry and was led to the privy and then back across the rear courtyard to the bath.

In the outer room she removed her clothes, took from Jiju a length of white cloth for modesty, waited while her hair was bound up, and stepped into the steam room. Everything was made of cedar and the steam coming from a long vent in the wall brought fragrance from the wood. Through the fog and heat, she could feel a lacing of cool mountain air that gave this bath a freshness unknown in the city. When her skin was pink and her head light, she left the steam room and crossed to the rinsing cabinet, so enervated she could barely trail the

white cloth about her. Jiju came to help her, mixing hot and cold water, pouring it over her back and shoulders and, when Aoi had had enough, holding ready a white drying robe. Feeling new all over, still a little giddy, Aoi returned to her room. Food had been brought and a message that the master would be waiting at sundown.

As she crossed the floor of her room to choose robes to wear, Aoi had suddenly to catch herself from falling. Breathing deeply, she put her hands to her cheeks, then lifted her hair. Ah, she sighed to herself, is it possible to overindulge even in bathing? Food did not appeal to her, wine she thought would be unwise, so she asked Jiju to lay out a pallet and leave her for a few minutes of rest. Lying down, she fell asleep and Jiju had to wake her to go to the main hall.

Aunt was there, sitting on one side of the square sunken hearth, Uncle opposite her with a cushion next to him for Aoi. Between them and withdrawn from the hearth was a curtain frame, which surprised Aoi. In this house where there seemed so little formality, why should the visiting nun feel she must so thoroughly conceal herself? The room was dim with the last light of day and all that could be seen of the lady was the corners of her robes, which spread

lavishly out from under the curtain. Aoi looked at them and she saw that Uncle did, too, and Aunt, and every servant who came into the room. There was nothing gorgeous about them, those edges of fabric, they were the usual gray and subdued orange of Buddhist nuns. But a gray of unusual luster, with then a slightly lighter gray and not one orange under-robe but two, one with a small figure woven into it, one of a color that, without the others to subdue it, would have been luscious.

"How pleasant to arrive when you are here," Aoi said, after greetings and introductions. "I was at one time in service in the palace, but . . ." She let the sentence trail off. It would not be tactful to say that she had been the empress' lady-in-waiting.

"Ah," came the voice from behind the curtain, "we must have many acquaintances in common." Her tone indicated doubt that Aoi could know anyone at all interesting, certainly no one known to this princess. The voice went on, sighing. "My whole life was spent in that palace, under the loving care of my guardian, the emperor. Now I wander where the wind takes me."

Uncle turned to Aoi. "She passed here one evening and I

saw her from the courtyard. Something about her was familiar and I sent a man to ask her who she was. We could not," he looked across at his wife, who turned her head away, "let her pass our gate as if she were a common nun. She had only one man and a serving woman with her and she was walking, her robes trailing in the dust, going to the nunnery that is just beyond here." He shook his head, thinking of the great change in her life.

The nun laughed, her voice gay and light. "I had no idea there was anyone on this mountain," she said, making Uncle someone among all the throngs who climbed to the temples. "It is fortunate for my vocation that you were kind enough to take me in. I had been neglecting my vows and had only a few sutras to dedicate. I counted the other day and since I've been here, I've made fifteen copies up there in that peaceful hut." She sighed again. "I must look to my spiritual life, since all else is finished for me."

There was a small silence, during which they could hear the tick of her fan as she opened and closed it, symbolizing the rise and fall of her expectations. Uncle coughed, picked up fire tongs to stir the ashes.

"You must tell us," he said to Aoi, "what is happening down below."

She told them of the sickness, of people falling in the streets, of temporary hospitals, of amnesties and tax forgiveness by the emperor, which were meant to influence the gods, and of special services at even the smallest temples and shrines. She told the story of a night of fires when the prince had come with five carriages to take the princess and her ladies and servants to safety because their house was threatened. She described the men of the government, who, the prince said, were afraid to go out of doors, even with guards all around them, because of unruly priests and vagrants.

Uncle shook his head. "It is a bad year, we can see it here, so many come to pray. And that, my friends, is what we will do also. Tonight," his face lit and he turned his smile on all of them, "you will see something that has been a secret treasure of my family for two hundred years." He rose, "Come, come," and they followed him through the eastern hall, outside, up a flight of stone steps, and into a small separate building, a miniature temple with one square room. Uncle himself carried the lantern, the servants left behind. The nun came modestly last, finally revealing herself, a small figure with bent head. Her hair had been cut off when she was made a

nun, but only at the sides, in a way that might almost have been a new fashion. She seemed to have invented a halfway commitment to forsaking the world. Her way of walking, the fall of her robes, even the way she held the end of one sleeve across her lower face were all elegant. Aoi had meant to look more closely as she entered the small temple, but as soon as the door was opened, she saw only what was inside.

Uncle had left the lantern behind and so it was dark except for a large gleaming eye that shot rays of green as Aoi moved forward. Hanging in air, coldly illuminated, the size of half a fist, it both drew and repelled. Aoi heard her own gasp and a small exclamation from the nun. As Uncle brought in the light, Aoi saw that the others, even Aunt, were bent to the floor in awe, as she was. Uncle said, "Ah," satisfied that he had surprised and impressed them, and then, "But look, now you can see all of it," and he set down the lamp.

There was a holy statue there, raised on several platforms, and Aoi could see at once that it was Kannon, goddess of mercy, though it was of a style she did not know. First there was a lotus leaf, flat, curled at the edges, and, rising from it, several layers of the rounded petals of a lotus flower on which the god-

dess sat, one knee propped up. She had six arms to show the strength and diversity of her power, with bracelets and arm-bands of gold. Carved draperies covered the lower body, leaving half her feet exposed, and a loop of folds angled across the torso, which had painted on it a simple smooth bodice of shell pink. The face looked directly out, there was a crown of gold on the head and a golden nimbus around it. Each arm held a religious symbol and in one of the right hands, horizontal to the body, was the glowing eye, mounted in a filigree of gold, dimmer now that the light was strong but shining still.

Uncle joined them and they prayed for a long time, asking for enlightenment and for the will to correct the many faults, collective and individual, that had brought such trouble to their country. The nun could be heard intoning under her breath, Uncle's rich voice rose now and then, Aunt and Aoi were silent. The green shining eye and the watching face seemed to Aoi unapproachable. Whoever had made this Kannon, in whatever place and age, had not seen Her as compassionate, she thought. Her aspect was, rather, watchful, admonishing, saying, "See thyself."

At Uncle's signal, they relaxed their posture and he ex-

plained his possession of such a rare treasure. "My ancestor was, for a while, a governor in the west and he saved a large group of people from across the water who washed up in two boats onto his shore after a storm. The local people feared them because they were strangers from the sea and they thought they might be pirates. But my grandfather of years ago protected them and sent them back to wherever it was, Silla or Bokkai, I don't know. Years later a tremendous box was delivered to the next governor by a trading ship and it was sent on to us in the capital. All that traveling and there was no damage to it, except here," he put his finger on a chip at the tip of one wooden lotus petal.

"But the eye," said the nun. "What gives it light?" Aoi looked at her. The fan was folded away and her face was visible, her expression uncertain, as if she assured herself that what she saw was only a statue. It is as they say, Aoi thought, she is beautiful. But she has had unhappiness in her beauty.

Uncle was answering her question. "That is the light of the wisdom of the goddess, actually, a fire pearl, the jewel of cold burning."

Aoi wished she could examine the eye. She knew that it

was made of phosphorescent crystal, but she could not tell if the green of the carved iris was painted or inlaid. From the way the shafts of color changed with the angle of viewing, she guessed that there were slivers of jade or glass, set close together and embedded in the crystal. She wondered how often they had to renew the power of the stone by exposing it to sunlight. But her head was bothering her, she heard a high singing sound, the bone over her eyes seemed swollen and throbbed with aching. She asked no questions and when the others moved to go, she stood and fell flat on the floor in a faint.

For a long time Aoi was too sick to know that she was sick. She hovered or cringed in an echoing, clanging world of fever. Voices spoke to her, accusing. She felt her size expand or contract, so that she seemed to be enormous and velvet-skinned or compact and hard. In either condition, she was the victim of hollow calls or drones. "You're late," the voices said and lateness was the most dismal of faults, or "Not here, not here, not here" echoed on and on and she had intruded, been denied. Her soul descended to every Buddhist hell, she felt the slashing showers of razors and molten lead, the gnawings, poundings, searings so vividly

described in the sutras. And always she fought, straining the fibers of her will. She came to exult in her violence, to rage in her resistance, she felt herself walk in ruin and assent to it, as long as she could step through wreckage and pass out of smoke and the hanging, falling shreds of destruction, to come again into health. At the last it was black, black night and she could not find herself.

Her first waking moment was to a sense of space, to feel herself as a tiny bar of composure in a cool volume which her senses filled to its cubic planes. She knew the precise cool height and sideways spread of her space, the cool square corners and edges, the cool emptiness, all filled with her being. She knew that she would sleep, that there would be no voices, no straining. Only now she saw the clear eye of Kannon watching her and she watched it back, she saw, as it saw, the reality of the world outside her shelter of space.

There came a day when she felt Aunt's hand lift her head, tasted soup, fingered soft worn silk, said, "Aunt?" and heard cries of joy and weeping. Not strong enough to leave the ocean of time in which she lifted and swung, Aoi did not open her eyes but let herself slide back into sleep. When finally she

came fully to herself, it was to hear her own breathing, to feel the intoxication of cold air. She found that it was night. She wanted food and tried to speak, to call someone, to hear herself, alive, physical, and still in the world, but the sound that came was a powerless mew. She lay wakeful until dawn when she found Aunt beside her, sleeping on a nearby pallet. This made her cry and so it was that Aunt received her back, weak and too moved to speak.

The boisterous strength of this loving woman, who was actually in no way related to Aoi, pulled, enticed, cradled, and bullied Aoi back to life. She made life attractive with tender, fragrant bits of food, cold facecloths, warm footstones, massage, reading aloud, accounts of sunsets and the flights of mountain grouse, a scattering of red maple leaves across the bed. And installments in the drama of the nun and the eye of Kannon.

It seemed that Aoi's faint, such a sudden, dramatic collapse in the presence of the goddess, had unstrung the former Wakagimi. She had cried out and rushed to Aoi, whom she had never seen before that day, lifting her and trying to raise her. "What can she have done?" she had said to Uncle.

This had released all Aunt's

anger and she had answered roughly, saying that it was not a question of sin but of sickness, she thought.

"And then she sat up and ripped open her fan to cover her face," Aunt said. "She was as still as stone while we got you out and I don't know what she did then, went back to her hut all alone, I think. He," she meant Uncle, "came with us, to harry the servants if they moved too slowly or got in the way. I think he just needed someone to shout at because he was upset. Finally, when you became very sick, he disappeared." Aunt laughed, content in her own proficiency. "Men aren't used to these things, are they?"

Uncle, not needed in helping to care for Aoi, deserted now that Aunt spent all her time in the sickroom, had gone back to visiting the hut. The servants had never admitted this, but Aunt had known he was not in the house, and she knew his heart.

"He has resigned his government service, you know, and he expected to use his influence on the new man. But the new man is headstrong and doesn't take suggestions. Also, he is not a youth any more, your uncle . . . You understand me?"

Suddenly, with no notice, no thanks for their weeks of hospitality, the nun had departed

one morning before dawn. Her absence had been only incidentally discovered because that same morning the eye of Kannon disappeared. Jiju had told Aoi about it, not really understanding what had happened.

"My mistress screamed. Well, she does that sometimes but this was different and it woke us all up. We thought—excuse me for saying this—but we thought that it was that you had died. You were very sick just then and she would go off to the master's temple when you slept. Oh, yes. Many times she called me to cool your skin with the well water while she went up there to pray." Aoi, still weak, had felt tears coming and she prevented them by concentrating her curiosity.

"And then?"

"She went to the master's room and we could hear—I know it is rude to say we listened but we could not help it—we could hear her crying and he was angry. Just then, it was unfortunate, but just at that time another maid came and said that the nun lady was not in her hut and showed what had been found. My mistress became very upset then."

"Something was found?"

"Oh, yes, my lady. She had cut off her hair, the part that was still long. It was tied up with a black cord and left on the

floor of the hut. We wondered what it meant, such a strange thing." Aoi did not explain that it meant that the nun had finally committed herself fully.

"The mistress sent men out to look for her. It was misty that day and we thought she might have wandered off and fallen. You could hear the men calling up and down the mountain but they couldn't find her, even at the nunnery, even in the village."

Jiju, never having been permitted to see the inside of the temple, knew nothing of the fire pearl. So it was not until she heard Aunt's version of the events of that morning that Aoi had known the full story.

"You cannot imagine the emptiness, the loss," she said to Aoi. "The goddess was not there, only a statue made of wood. I don't know how even a nun could have had the courage to touch that eye, to wrest it away." She shook her head. "There are times when I don't like to be right. But that is a bad woman, nun or no. She has stolen that jewel which is more than a jewel."

Sitting on the floor beside Aoi's bed, Aunt had patted and stroked her arm, as if to comfort herself with Aoi's returning health. Yet she was fearful.

"Ah, what an omen, in such times. You should see Her, the

little Kannon, without Her fire pearl. She knows. She knows who took it, She knows also who left Her unprotected, who placed too little value on Her." Aunt could not speak of this calmly. "I told him long ago that such a miraculous thing should be in a temple. But it was his family's, he said, it had no need of priests, it had come to the Minabushis." Minabushi was Uncle's family name.

"But, Aunt, in times like these . . ."

"We don't have thieving up here, this is not like the city."

"You said it was wrested away. The filigree, then, was all twisted and bent?"

Aunt stopped her indignant recital and frowned at Aoi. "What? The filigree? Well, of course it must have been . . . No, it was as before, only empty. But I don't see any significance in that. The eye is stolen!"

Feeling that Uncle had, through careless possession of the treasure of the statue, made the theft possible, Aunt seemed to have taken to herself the worry of protecting it from now on. "Anyway," she said, "the statue itself is safe. I have Jiju's brother sitting by the door all day and an old man sleeps in there at night. No one could possibly get to it now. I have seen to Her protection, though it comes late."

Uncle had become withdrawn and cross, Aunt said, and was keeping to his part of the house. Aoi had seen him only once and he had seemed jolly enough but had suddenly excused himself and left.

Still sleeping a great part of the day, sometimes wakeful at night, Aoi turned all this in her idle mind. She considered it from every angle, imagining each person's feelings and reactions: Uncle without his work, politely disregarded by the new man in charge of his ministry; Aunt denied the comfort of comforting him because he would not admit to any such need; both of them brought into the presence of evil times through Aoi's sudden sickness; and Wakagimi the nun, with her palace charms, her air of being still the emperor's beloved, fending off the realization of her actual situation. The eye of Kannon was clearly in a certain place. It had amused Aoi to find the solution to its theft and it would amuse her to announce, when finally she was strong enough, that she would untangle the puzzle for them.

By now Aoi had come to realize that the warm days had passed and autumn's frosts and chill winds had come. She slept at night under many layers of bedclothes. The wind was a close familiar on these heights,

but it seemed to blow over and around the carved-out place where the house sat, pressing through the cedars, its passage on the mountainside marked by sweeping strokes across the treetops. It made a deep sound which Aoi came to think of as the unchanging rush of life and time. Because of her illness, she felt herself a part of the cosmos and she could no longer find importance in anything of the world or in her own life. This is what makes it easy for those who are about to die to forsake their families and all else, she thought. Such things drop away of their own weight when the spirit shakes free.

Budding, flowering,
Finally dried and faded,
Bushclover blossoms
Whisper and brush together,
One by one blowing away.

The poem grew in Aoi's mind and pleased her. She turned to look for paper and inkstone, to write it down, but stopped herself with chiding. Let it go, she said to herself, it need not take physical form. You would be stroking the paper, admiring colors and textures, back with all your love of beauty.

From this day Aoi considered herself well, though her body was weak for a long time afterward.

"Aunt," she said one day, "I think that the little Kannon needs her clear eye and that it is time for the house to be at ease again. Could you bring Uncle to discuss it with us?"

"But we have sent here and there and they cannot find that thieving nun."

"I think we should talk about it. A few things have occurred to me."

Aoi was sitting up, half-propped against a stout arm-rest, bundled in more clothes than she felt she needed but which Aunt had insisted she should wear. In the garden, chrysanthemums shook in the wind. Heavy clouds approached across the plain, in places blurred into rain. It was cold and in a brazier beside Aoi the glow of charcoal was veiled with gray ash.

Uncle's face, when she saw it, seemed veiled in the same way, his liveliness masked. Aoi had never seen him look wan. Aunt, beside him, let show every shifting least concern, draping another coat across Aoi's shoulders, squaring away a cushion for Uncle, stirring the coals in the brazier, calling again for wine, laughing at her own impatience as she waited for it, admiring the steam as she poured it into cups, humoring Aoi by finally falling silent and encouraging her to begin her

discussion. In all this, she shied away from Uncle, not speaking directly to him.

"Uncle," Aoi said, smiling at him, "I think that I have brought you a lot of trouble."

"And what trouble is that?" he said. "The trouble of seeing you come back to life again?"

"There has been severe disturbance in your household and I am sorry for it."

"Any disturbance has come from another source," he said. Aunt began to say how willingly she had nursed, but he was concentrated on Aoi, the conversation only between the two of them.

"If you allow it, Uncle, I have certain explanations about that," Aoi said. He nodded, inclining his head but dubious.

"The loss of your treasure has been upsetting, the more so because it has come after an upsetting time. Wakagimi was a rather puzzling nun, so much the charming young lady, so little devout or serious. Did you find her so?"

"Um."

"But when she saw the eye of Kannon, it seemed to me she was affected. She spoke of sin, Aunt said, when I fell. Aunt believes that she stole the eye, but I think she left for another reason."

Uncle was stony-faced.

"But, Aunt," Aoi went on,

"you did not seem fond of Wakagimi, though I would never suggest that you had taken the eye after she left, to make her seem a thief."

"Aoi, my dear, you are raving. I? *Steal anything?*"

"You are right, these things occurred to me during the aftermath of fever and I say them aloud only to show you how many possibilities came to me. Uncle, shall I tell what happened? It seems to me a good joke we should all share."

Looking at his wife, Uncle was uncertain.

"See if my weakness has led me into fantasies. I think it was like this:

"She is, Uncle, a very charming and beautiful woman, many have found her so. And one doesn't lose such basic qualities just because one becomes religious. Or professes to become, I should say. Because I think that her lack of seriousness was finally hateful to you, and perhaps to her, too. The epidemic had reached into this house and the state of the world must have seemed to require cleansing and prayer. What you did, Uncle, was to take the shining eye of Kannon, set it in the thatch at the top of the wall of her hut, and let it beam at her in the dark. She would have felt her selfishness and shallowness revealed, I think. Far from taking

the eye for its value as something to sell, she fled from it. Do you agree?"

Aunt was puzzling through Aoi's theory and arriving at the scene of the haughty nun finding herself regarded by that cold eye. "You did that?" she said to Uncle.

Uncle was uncomfortable, not ready to congratulate himself, afraid of abuse for causing Aunt so much worry.

"Thatch is convenient for holding small things," he said. "You can tuck them in among the straw. I told her she should not . . . uh, that she should not waste her spiritual essence, that the world is in need of serious dedication and prayer. Then I left and when it got dark, I knew the eye would shine at her." Uncle seemed undecided whether to be proud or abashed to have been so dramatic. He turned squarely toward Aunt and spoke with indignation. "She was supposed to be a nun, *ne?* But all she talked about was the palace, the emperor, which lady had been insulting to her, the mirrors she used to own, the robes the emperor had given her, the ceremonies she had seen. Do you understand?"

Aunt willingly joined him in his criticism, not mentioning the many afternoons he had spent in the hut or commenting on his change of opinion about

Wakagimi. Aoi watched as they found more and more of the nun's faults they could agree on and she watched Aunt's thoughts go on to practical details. "But I have never seen the eye removed. How . . ."

"Aunt," said Aoi, "let me explain and then Uncle can say if I have imagined things wrongly." Uncle had relaxed, he was prepared to play Aoi's game.

"The crystal of the eye glows because it can store the power of the sun. But that power must be renewed when it grows weak. Therefore, the eye must be removable so it can be taken out and put in sunlight for a few hours or a day—it varies with the crystal."

Uncle was nodding, delighted. "She knows, she knows even that," he said to Aunt.

"At first, Aunt, I thought that you had taken it and used it for the same purpose, to frighten Wakagimi and cause her to look inward. But you said it had been wrenched away from the statue and it was only when I questioned you that you recalled that the filigree had been opened and had not, in fact, been damaged. I think that Uncle has not told even you of the method of removing the eye, that he has kept secret the fact that it weakens."

"You have been taking it out

and I never knew?" said Aunt.

Uncle only smiled, looking at her, a keeper of secrets and perhaps not only this one. As usual, all Aunt's thoughts showed on her face: surprise, resentment, assessment of her own lack of openness in some matters, agreement, affection, and, strongest of all, amusement. She threw up her hands and gave a shout of laughter.

Uncle looked smugly at Aoi and Aoi felt that she had done what she had hoped to do, made them peaceful again.

"You will not tell us how it comes out?" she said.

"No. But I will show you. Now that you know what became of it, perhaps you will take away your guards and I can give it back to the little Kannon. Aoi, come, come."

"She can't go outside!"

"We'll help her."

"But the wind . . ."

"No, no, Aunt. I want to visit the goddess, I have much to thank her for."

Supported on both sides, Aoi went along the hall. She was frightened to leave her room, and this fact frightened her more. Passing into the raw and surging air of the outside, Aoi looked only where her feet must step, she was not yet ready for the long view from the mountain. They went up the steps

and into the temple. Uncle carried a box.

When the box was opened, the light was there, like a presence. Uncle went to the statue and turned a little knob that looked like a ring on the hand that held the empty filigree frame, which opened into two prongs. Fitting a hole in the crystal onto a short post, he turned the knob again and the glowing eye was restored to the little Kannon.

Feeling herself emptied and clear-spirited, Aoi made prayers of thanks and then sat meditating. She was more comfortable now in the presence of the sober-faced goddess with her luminous, observing eye. The world is as it is, the goddess had taught her, and we must see it clearly. When bad things come, we go through them, if that is meant to be, and find ourselves more able than we had thought. She felt that the memory of the glowing eye of this Kannon would always

remind her of the rod of strength that had been herself when she had come out of the fever. Recalling the sea of tranquil floating into which she had waked, she knew that she would find it easier to move beyond the world as her spiritual maturity progressed.

"Uncle," she said as they sat there together, "the nun who used to be Wakagimi has more of a debt of gratitude to you than she knows. You have caused her to think and contemplate and her spirit, along with her body, has gone out into the world."

"What leaf, soaring high
On driving wind, so touches
Heaven as does my
Soul, rising in searching flight
To the perfect Buddha-mind."

It was Aunt who spoke the poem and they looked at her in surprise.

"Have you forgotten," she said, "how I prayed to Kannon when you were sick? I did not pray just for you."

THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



Just a shadow of his former self? We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less—and be sure to include a crime, please), based on the above photograph. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the April Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.

FICTION



Birthright

by Elana Lore

Illustration by Kurt Wallace

62

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It had begun to rain—a light summer rain—and Uwe was hungry. It seemed like it should be almost time for supper, and he wondered why no one had made him come in yet. He was a little bit tired, too. He wasn't usually allowed to play outside by himself, especially for this long, but Nanny had said it was okay, as long as he didn't go out in the street.

The fathers were starting to come home from the city. He thought it was exciting that they got to ride trains every day. One of them had waved to Uwe as he passed in his big black car.

Uwe's father took the train, too, and he had a big briefcase like the other fathers, but he didn't go to work in the city every day. Sometimes he worked in the big room at the back of the house—the one Uwe wasn't allowed to go in. Sometimes men dressed like the train fathers came to the house and spent the day inside the room with him. And sometimes he went on trips.

Uwe had seen his father's suitcase in the hall after lunch today—but not his mother's. Sometimes his mother went away, too, now that Nanny lived with them. He didn't remember whether his father was coming home from a trip, or going away on one, or whether he was just

going into the city. Uwe didn't see much of him. When he went to the city, he left before Uwe got up in the morning, and usually returned after he was in bed.

He squeezed himself through the great hedges surrounding the patio and tried to push open the kitchen door, but it didn't give. He knocked, but no one answered. Then he stood on his toes, turned the handle with both hands, and pushed hard, and finally he heard the catch click. No one was in the kitchen, and there weren't any smells of food. He stood in the doorway and listened for voices, but all he heard was the sonorous ticking of the great hall clock.

He knew he wasn't allowed, but he opened the refrigerator door anyway and looked inside. There was a hunk of cheese and a jar of gherkins right down where he could reach them. He liked the little pickles. He opened the jar very carefully and took two out. They dripped, so he ran over to the sink and got a paper towel and wiped up the spills. Nanny would be very angry.

He wasn't allowed to play with knives, either, so he grimaced and pulled off a chunk of cheese with his fingers. They were only a little bit dirty, he thought.

He listened carefully for foot-

steps, but all he could hear now was the soft murmur of voices in another room. Maybe the library, he thought. He hoped it wasn't company again. He always had to get dressed up and be presented. Then, after only a few minutes, Nanny would come and whisk him away, usually to bed. He didn't like the scratchy clothes he had to wear, and he didn't like most of the grownups. They treated him like a baby, and some of them pinched him.

After he finished his cheese and gherkins, he wiped his hands very carefully on the paper towel and threw it in the wastebasket under the sink, just like his mother did when she used them. He was very tired now, but he didn't want to meet any more grownups.

He remembered his little hiding place—the one his mother had made for him when they had played that day in the kitchen, before Nanny had come to live with them. There was a cabinet right by the pantry with a little shelf on it where she kept the table linens. The back of the cabinet was loose, and if he wiggled carefully, he could get through the hole and surprise his mother by coming out the pantry door. His mother had put his soft little baby blanket in the cabinet—the one he was too old for now, except as

a toy—and his old teddy bear. He had added some of his toy cars and trucks so he could play down there. Sometimes he hid there when Nanny was angry with him.

Storm clouds were darkening the sky outside, but he couldn't reach the light switch. He wasn't afraid of the dark. Sometimes he liked it. He opened the door quietly, climbed in, and felt around. Everything was still where he had left it. He curled up in his little blanket and pulled his teddy bear in with him. Soon he had dozed off.

He didn't know how much time had passed, but the voices had gotten louder, and they woke him up. He wondered if his parents were having a party in the library. He listened carefully. No, those weren't party voices. Those were mean voices.

Then he heard, "Jane, don't TOUCH that GUN." It could have been Jane, or Blaine, or Dane. He wasn't sure—he didn't recognize the name. He did know it was his father's gravelly voice, commanding now, with that peculiar cadence he had to his speech, "Don't TOUCH that GUN." Then he heard a loud noise—twice, maybe three times. It hurt his ears. But then he didn't hear the mean voices again, so he went back to sleep.

When he woke up again, it

was morning, and the sunlight was in his eyes in his new bedroom—the one with the butterfly curtains at the window—and his new mother was waking him up for breakfast. He knew she wasn't the same mother he had had before. He wondered if maybe his parents had gone on another trip, and when they would come back.

His mother had told him always to be polite with grown-ups, so he waited for the woman to tell him where his parents had gone, like Nanny did when they were away and he woke up scared, but she never did. After a while, he began to think they weren't coming back, but he was afraid to ask the woman.

One day, the woman told him to call her Mom. He wanted to ask why, but instead, he just became very still inside, and didn't say anything. He didn't call her anything for a very long time, until once when he was sick and there was no one else to take care of him. Even so, he remembered to behave very well so his parents would be proud of him when they came back. Only sometimes he forgot, and thought to himself *if they come back.*

Hoover's artistic talent surfaced in kindergarten. He could do almost anything — drawing,

painting, sculpting in clay. The Morans encouraged him, enrolling him in art classes on Saturdays, which was good, since that was when his best friend, David Korman, had to go to temple.

By the time he was nine, he was taking classes at the high school nearby. The Morans saw the pattern emerging in his work, but they never spoke of the haunting drawings of the beautiful woman, or the pictures of the large country kitchen. And Hoover was never sure whether the woman and the kitchen were real, or just more things from his dreams.

My wife Terrill told me once that Hoover Moran was the kind of name a linebacker for the Rams should have, or at least a demolitions expert.

Hoover is tall, thin, handsome, gentle—exactly what you would expect an artist to be. He has cornsilk blond hair, haunting pale-blue eyes, and an aura of not being totally earth-bound—Terrill's description of him when she first fixed him up with her friend Cristina, whom he later married.

It was love at first sight for Hoover and my wife, and soon I found that she was treating him the same way my mother had when we were kids. Always, if Hoover was within five

miles of our house, he got the first cookies off the sheet, the extra bowl of soup, hugs. There were times when I thought he was my mother's favorite child. And he wasn't even Jewish.

Hoover always seemed surprised at and appreciative of any attention he got, and oblivious to the way he attracted females. I gave up on being jealous years ago and began to take it all with good humor, just happy to be friends with him.

I had been surprised when he and Cristina had hit it off, although Terrill hadn't. Cristina is a petite, bubbly Italian whose dark eyes are always full of mischief. I've never seen her when she hasn't either been making people laugh or trying to feed them. I thought she was good for him, since he had a tendency to get so absorbed in his work that he forgot about the rest of the human race.

When Hoover had called and asked me to meet him, he had sounded upset, but over the years, I've learned not to try to worm information out of him. He gets it all out eventually, but at his own pace.

It was one of those strange nights you get in Manhattan every once in a while. It had been unseasonably warm, and once the rain had stopped, a steamy haze had risen from the street, casting an eerie glow

over the skyline. Even the noises of rush hour seemed muted, far away.

The restaurant was deserted. New Yorkers usually don't eat until about eight, so Hoover and I would have plenty of time to talk before it got crowded and noisy. Between the nurses' strike at the hospital and Terrill's hectic graduate school schedule, we hadn't seen each other since his mother's funeral, about five months before.

Hoover was in the restaurant when I got there, his portfolio at his side, a beer in front of him, and two waitresses eyeing him discreetly from across the room. He looked tired, and when I asked if he was okay, he said he had a bad headache.

He had apparently asked them to have a bloody Mary ready for me when I arrived, and it was, about thirty seconds after I'd sat down.

We filled the first few minutes with small talk. He was on his second beer and we'd ordered dinner before he finally seemed to come to a decision.

"Dave, did I ever tell you I was adopted?"

I tried to hide my surprise. My mind raced back through our childhood, and as I looked back on it, it made sense. I had, over the years, realized that he didn't really take after either of his parents, but it had never

occurred to me to say anything about it.

"No. Did you always know about it?"

"I don't know. Sort of, I guess. I wasn't adopted until I was three or four, I think. I still have some memories of my other family. At least, I think it's my other family."

"Why didn't you ever tell me about it?" I asked, then realized I shouldn't have. It was petty.

Hoover shrugged. "My parents never brought it up, so I was never sure whether I was adopted or not. And I didn't want to ask them. I was sort of afraid they might tell me something bad about my real parents... or maybe they would give me away, too. Then, when I got older, I just wanted to fit in with the other kids. I had enough problems anyway—I was a head taller than everyone else in school, and I liked to draw better than I liked to play ball. A lot of the kids gave me a hard time."

I played with my swizzle stick, listening.

"Anyway, I wasn't sure until last November, when my mother died. I found a birth certificate in her safe deposit box, and I think it's mine. No. I *know* it's mine. It's got my birthdate on it, and the name is similar."

"You mean, they never once told you you were adopted?"

"No. Neither one of them ever mentioned it." He sighed. "My parents loved me—I know that. But there was always something held back—things we were never able to talk about. It's funny, too, because my parents were real talkers."

We both smiled at that, remembering.

He paused and took another sip of his beer. "Suddenly, when my mother died, I started to feel like a real orphan. And Cristina and I have been talking a lot lately about starting a family. I'm not quite sure how I would feel about... my real parents, if I found them. But I'd sort of like to know if there are any genetic skeletons in my closet—or worse."

Hoover traced circles on his beer mug, not looking at me. "When I was little, I was never sure whether I just made up this other family, or whether they were real. But I used to lie awake at night and think about—you know, what they were like. Whether they died in a car accident, or had some tragic disease, or just decided they didn't want me any more because I didn't behave or something..." His voice trailed off.

"And then, when I got older, I started having even worse thoughts. Like, what if I accidentally married my sister or

something? And every time I got sick with some unspecified ailment, I used to wonder whether it ran in the family."

"I would never have thought of any of that kind of stuff," I said.

"I wonder whether regular adopted kids do?" Hoover said. "They at least have one advantage—they know for sure that they're adopted."

"I never thought of it that way," I said. I wondered if anybody at the hospital had done any studies of older adopted kids.

"Have you tried to find them?"

He took another sip of his beer. "I registered with one of those matchmaker outfits here in New York. You know—the ones where if your real parent also registers, they'll get you in touch with one another? So far, nobody's claimed me."

"Can I help?"

"I was hoping you'd ask. You were always better at this kind of detective stuff than I was, and besides, you have all your medical connections at the hospital. I don't have the vaguest idea of where to begin to search for them, or what to ask them medically if I do find them. I thought maybe someone on your staff at the hospital would know something about how to find parents of adopted kids, or could at least tell me what I need to look for medically."

"I'll ask around," I said. "Do you have a copy of the birth certificate you can give me?"

He pulled a small envelope out of his jacket pocket and opened it. "I brought it with me."

I laid it flat on the table. "Connecticut, State Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics. Birth Registration Notice. This certifies that a certificate of birth has been filed, et cetera, et cetera, name of Uwe Karl Svenson, sex male, born on October 19, 1950," I read. "At Wharton Hospital, County of Fairfield, Connecticut. Name of Father: Karl Frederick Svenson. Maiden name of Mother: Eugenie Katerina van der Lear."

"That's my birthdate, and I checked around, and I found out that Uwe is pronounced a lot like Hoover."

"Well," I said, sighing, "this is pretty tragic. If your real name is Svenson, you're going to have to give up the St. Patrick's Day parade."

"Probably beer, too."

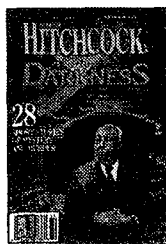
"Nah, that's going too far."

Just then I unfolded the right-hand corner of the page and began to laugh. There were ink smudges there—a medium-sized fingerprint, and an enormous sausage-like blob. "It must be you. You always did have big feet."

"You're a big help," Hoover

NEW
FROM THE EDITOR OF
ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

A Brief **DARKNESS**



The stuff of
which nightmare
is made...subtly
clad, so that its
implications don't
sink in all at once.

Twenty-eight unnerv-
ing tales laced with the
unexpected, clever solu-
tions, and that Hitchcock
humor.

Please send me Alfred Hitchcock's
A BRIEF DARKNESS. Enclosed is my
check or money order for \$4.50.

Mail to: **ALFRED HITCHCOCK**
ANTHOLOGIES
P.O. Box 40
Vernon, NJ 07462

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE/ZIP _____

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery. Available only
in the U.S.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DHJ723

said, but he was smiling, too.

"Is this it?" I asked. "You didn't find anything else?"

He shook his head. "No. But there was an address—24 Maple Street, in Wharton—on the envelope I found the certificate in. Someone named Smith lives there now, but I thought I might drive up and look at the house anyway."

"That's weird. I would think that there would have been something else—at least the adoption papers."

"I've been through everything twice. This is it. It made me wonder, too. What if I was never really adopted? That would explain why Mom and Dad never told me about it."

Hoover parked the car at the corner of the street and sat there, just taking in the neat houses, the well-manicured lawns. He was excited, and a little bit scared. His head had started to throb again on the drive up from the city, and he was upset that it was interfering with what he had hoped would be an enjoyable day.

He got out of the car and began to walk down the sidewalk. Kids were playing ball on one of the lawns, and they paused to look him over as he passed. He smiled at them and went on. Twenty-four Maple Street was

a white frame colonial—common in that part of Connecticut. It was a large house, in a nice neighborhood, but there was nothing exceptional about it. He knew there would be no secret hiding places under the stairwell, or in the little cabinet in the kitchen.

Suddenly he was flooded with the self-doubt that had plagued him since childhood. Had he just imagined the house—made it up from one of the books he had read, or created it in one of his drawings? And the woman—had he made her up, too?

He felt his head begin to throb even worse, and he rushed back to the car, a jumble of emotions overtaking him.

Hoover shut and locked the bedroom door and closed the blinds against the early afternoon sun, wincing from the stab of pain the direct sunlight caused behind his eyes. Then he placed the small electric fan on the bedside table, where it would blow directly in his face.

He glanced at the small digital clock: two thirty. Cristina would be out shopping for at least another hour, even if she didn't stop at her mother's to make fresh pasta. He felt a surge of panic at the thought that she might not be home for a while, and another as he thought about what might hap-

pen if she did come home on time. This was the worst headache he had had, and he didn't want her to see him like this.

All his fears came back to him in vivid pictures then—his parents tragically cut down in their youth by horrible, disfiguring diseases, laid out in immense coffins in a dark room. Himself, lying in a hospital bed, concerned doctors hovering over him, saying, "If only we could find your parents, we could get you a transplant in time." And the worst one, the one that woke him some nights in a sweat: the picture of himself in the hospital, with the concerned doctor saying, "We have found your parents, but they have refused to help. There is nothing we can do for you now."

He felt another stab of pain then, and the nausea began, as it had before. He quickly removed his clothes and tossed them on the armchair. His temples were pounding. He had to get into bed now, while he still could.

He lay down carefully, and then a thought occurred to him. He cautiously rose from the bed and struggled to cross the room. Each new motion increased the nausea, but he fought it until he had moved the heavy armchair up against the bedroom door.

He sank gratefully to the bed

then, exhausted, and pulled the light covers up over his shoulders. He could feel the cool air of the fan relaxing the muscles in his face, and then his mind went blank.

Wednesday Terrill had an evening class, and I came home early to an empty house, my mind still on Hoover and his sudden revelations.

Terrill and I were pretty familiar with the Wharton area. We usually go up to Connecticut two or three times each summer on the weekend. Terrill likes to go antiquing, and I usually make the rounds of book dealers to add to my collection. Every once in a while, we just go up and spend the day at the beach. I prefer the ocean, but Terrill doesn't swim too well, so Long Island Sound is just her speed.

I thought about it for a while as I heated up some stuff I found in the refrigerator. There was no law that said we had to wait until summer. I checked Terrill's appointment book. Saturday was free until the evening. I penciled in, "Antiquing in Ct.?" and closed the book up.

If we started out early, I'd have time to check out the address Hoover had given me, maybe talk to some people at

Wharton Hospital, see if I could find some other leads.

I was getting excited about this. I thought of Hoover. Poor Hoover. Put a paintbrush in his hand and he was brilliant; ask him to follow some simple directions, or solve any problem involving logic, and he was lost. He operated almost totally on instinct. They were good instincts, but nevertheless . . . oh, well. I loved these kinds of puzzles, and I was glad to be able to help him. I wondered where he would have been able to turn if I had become an architect instead of a hospital administrator.

I put the excitement aside for a moment and tried to think logically about where to look. It would have been a whole lot easier if we had had some adoption papers to work with.

There were two ways to go, depending on what Hoover really wanted. We could find his parents and get their medical history firsthand, provided they were alive and wanted to be reunited with him. I wondered what the odds of that were. Or, if that failed, we could follow the general consensus of the medical staff at the hospital and just wait until Cristina was pregnant, then run some tests on her and the fetus. Testing Hoover would be expensive, and maybe not very helpful.

I wondered what kind of people Hoover's real parents had been, and why they had given him up for adoption. And I began to think of the Morans, too. I had liked Hoover's parents. Sometimes, when my sisters had ganged up on me, I had envied Hoover for being an only child, and wondered what it would be like to live with them for a while.

On her way home from work on Thursday, Cristina's attention had been caught by the front page of the late edition of the *New York Post*. Though she usually didn't read the newspaper, she bought a copy and brought it home for Hoover.

Hoover was still in his studio working—at least, the radio was still on in there. She had slammed the door when she had come in, so he'd know she was home if he wanted to talk.

She was still angry and upset from the weekend. She had banged on the bedroom door for almost a half hour before he had answered, and he had looked awful—dark circles under his eyes, his face pale. She had wanted to take him to the doctor, but he had insisted all he needed was a couple of aspirin. And after all that worry, when she had asked him what he had done while she was out, he said, "Nothing." She wondered if

there was another woman.

She wasn't sure whether to be angry, or especially loving, or just worried, and she didn't like the tension in the house. After about fifteen minutes, she heard Hoover washing up. She barely glanced around when he came in and sat down at the large kitchen table.

"See that picture on the front page," she said, tasting the minestrone she was reheating. "She looks like that woman you keep painting. Do you know her?"

The headline read, "Connecticut Woman Found Strangled," and the photo below it did, in fact, look like the three portraits he kept in the back of the stack in his studio.

He felt his stomach muscles knot and panic set in. He ate little that evening, and slept less that night.

He knew it was unreasonable—the name was different and everything—and he tried to think of other things, but he just couldn't let go of it. What if she was the real one—his real mother—and someone had killed her when he was so close to finding her?

The drive up the Merritt Parkway was pleasant, despite the potholes and hills. Some of the trees were in full bloom along the

road; others were still budding. Between the trees, we could see pale clusters of wildflowers—jonquils, tiger lilies, violets—and, occasionally, isolated houses.

Wharton was about an hour's drive away, and Terrill and I were both excited. We'd been too busy lately to take any time for ourselves. We turned on an oldies station and sang along—badly, I might add—to all the fifties songs we remembered the words to.

I dropped Terrill off at one of her favorite antique shops and arranged to meet her for lunch later. I had my work cut out for me. I'm not one of the world's greatest researchers, but after a couple of days of thought, I had come up with a plan of action.

The Wharton library was small, but I figured they'd have old newspapers and telephone directories. The librarian, who looked like an advertisement for L.L. Bean, set me up in a small cubicle with a stack of phone books and canisters of microfilm, explained how to use the machine, and left me to it. I decided the phone books would be easier, so I began looking up Svensons, hoping there were some relatives around somewhere.

I found Karl and family easily in the 1950 directory, but

that was the only Svenson listing in Wharton. I had no luck in the neighboring towns, either.

The 1951 directory was just as useless, but the 1952 one caught my attention. Karl Svenson had moved from Maple Lane to State Street. I knew the new neighborhood—it was one of the most exclusive areas in the county. I wondered what had happened to improve his fortunes so drastically in those two years.

I checked hurriedly through 1953, 1954, and 1955. No change in the first two, but no listing at all in 1955. I searched my memory. Hoover and I had gone to kindergarten together, and we had known each other before then, so the timing worked out right for him to have been adopted—or whatever—some time in 1953 or 1954.

That helped immeasurably. I dug through the canisters until I found the 1953 Wharton *Eagle* and loaded it into the machine first. Reading through old, small-town newspapers of the “a good time was had by all” school of journalism is tedious and boring. Give me a New York newspaper any day. Fortunately, towns as small as these didn’t have a lot of news, so it went quickly. I was about half through with the 1954 papers when I realized it was time to meet Terrill for lunch. I re-

turned the phone books and canisters I had gone through to the librarian and told her I’d be back for the rest in about an hour.

By two thirty, I was back at it, reeking of garlic from the pasta we had eaten, my stomach beginning to send signals that it was definitely displeased. Trust Terrill, with her steel-plated stomach, to talk me into eating a lunch that would fella a platoon of Marines.

Fortunately, I hit paydirt almost immediately.

August 21, 1954: “Mysterious deaths in Wharton have police baffled.

“Two people were killed, one found seriously injured yesterday, when police responded to a call from a neighbor who had thought she had heard gunfire.

“The bodies of scientist Karl Svenson and his son’s governess were found in the library of their State Street home.

“Dr. Svenson, 36, and the governess, Margaret Sloane, 25, were pronounced dead on arrival at Wharton Hospital of gunshot wounds.

“Dr. Svenson’s wife Eugenie, who was also shot, was rushed to Wharton Hospital, where she remains in critical condition. Doctors say they found a bullet lodged near her spine. They say that even if she does survive, they expect her to remain par-

alyzed because of the location of the wound.

"The Svensons, who have lived in Wharton for the past six years, had hired Miss Sloane a few months earlier to care for their son Uwe, 3.

"The child was found by the police in another room, unhurt, during a search of the premises.

"Police say the murder weapon was found in the library near the bodies, but they have released no information on whether one of the three victims did the shooting or whether it was done by an outsider. They did say there was no sign of forcible entry, but that the kitchen door was open when they arrived."

I read on, fascinated, but there was little additional information, and Uwe's name was not mentioned in any subsequent reports. It made me wonder. I would have thought that a multiple murder like that would have made big headlines for months, but this story seemed to die out quickly.

I made copies of the interesting stuff, and realized it was almost time to pick up Terrill. I went back out to the car, dug the local map out of the glove compartment, and decided to take a little trip down to State Street first.

I was impressed. The house was one of those huge coloni-

als—the original ones—that you find on postcards of New England. It was painted a pleasant shade of charcoal grey, with black trim, and it rambled over maybe a quarter acre of land. It was set back from the street, behind some trees, but I could still see that we were talking a couple of mil, at least, in real estate terms.

Terrill and I were both quiet on the trip back. I think we had exhausted ourselves. She asked me how my book hunting had gone, and I realized, guiltily, that I had forgotten about the books. I told her what I'd come up with on Hoover's family, and she had the same questions I did.

Terrill and I had gone to a party Saturday night, so we slept in late on Sunday. I knew she had a lot of studying to do, so I called Hoover to see if we could meet somewhere.

Hoover didn't sound too hot. He said he and Cristina had had a fight, and she had gone to spend the afternoon at her mother's.

"Why don't you come over?" he said. "There's a baseball game on TV this afternoon, and there's a ton of food in the refrigerator. It's Italian kosher," he chuckled. "Pure, unadulterated carbohydrates."

Hoover looked exhausted. I

had a lot of trouble picturing Hoover and Cristina having a serious argument, but you never can tell.

He already had the TV set on when I arrived, but turned down low, and he had set out some cold chicken and made a salad.

He popped the tabs on two beers and poured them, and we sat down at the kitchen table and started stuffing ourselves. Terrill and I eat light on Sunday mornings, and I realized I was ravenous.

"This is delicious," I said, biting into the chicken. "If this thing between you and Cristina is serious, she can come live in my kitchen any time."

"Terrill would really appreciate that," he chuckled. His face darkened. "She's really upset with me. With good reason. Come on into my studio. Bring your chicken with you."

He wiped his hands carefully on a napkin, then brought a couple more with him, absent-mindedly, as he led me to the bedroom they had converted into his office.

On one side of the room was an easel with a blank canvas on it, and an artist's angled table with a jumble of tubes of paint, pencils, charcoals, and other equipment. On the other, backs to the wall mostly, were canvases. He stooped down and rooted through one of the stacks

and pulled out one, and then another, and set them down in the light.

One was a painting of a kitchen—a large, old fashioned kitchen with a black and white tiled floor, a tiled center island, and those boxy white pre-war appliances. The other was a portrait of a woman—a strikingly beautiful blonde, with pale blue eyes and a radiant smile. It was one of Hoover's best—it radiated personality and warmth.

"I don't know for sure who that woman is, but I've been painting her all my life. I have others, but that one is my favorite."

He reached down and ran his fingers along the length of the painting. "I think she might be my mother."

He sat down on the floor, his back to the wall. "When I was in college, one day I walked down to the stationery store to buy a notebook. It was the first day of class.

"As I was walking down the street, I saw this woman," he gestured at the painting, "or a woman very much like her. She was just the right age, too. About forty. I was so attracted to her that I just stared. She noticed me, smiled briefly, and began to walk on. I felt this urge to go over to her and touch her, say something to her. She

kept walking—never turned back. I felt like a jerk.”

He looked at me to measure my reaction, then went on.

“After that, I would look for her on the street. I never saw her again, but I saw others like her. They were all blonde, about forty, beautiful, warm. I reacted strongly to all of them. Physically. But I never spoke to any of them. I just looked to see if they would recognize me, but they didn’t seem to.”

He paused then. “That’s not the end of the story, either. Cristina brought home the newspaper on Thursday. Remember that woman who was strangled in Connecticut last week?”

I nodded, and he reached over to his table, pulled a folded sheet of newspaper out of a drawer, and began to smooth it out.

“See the resemblance?” he said.

I did. She looked remarkably like the woman in the painting, and I wondered what he was leading up to.

“I haven’t been able to sleep since I saw this. I keep thinking, what if she was my real mother, and now she’s dead?”

I glanced over the copy at the bottom of the page, and he seemed to sense why.

“I know. It’s not the same name or anything. It’s an un-

reasonable fear. But it seems like the whole world is caving in on me at once. I’ve been having these bad headaches and blacking out. Then I drove up to Connecticut to look at the house, and it’s not the one I remember. And now this. Cristina isn’t sure whether I’m seeing another woman, or I’m totally going nuts, or what, and I don’t know how to explain any of this to her.”

Hoover held his head in his hands, then rubbed his eyes. “I don’t know what to do.”

“How long have you been having these blackouts?” I asked.

“A couple of months. I started getting headaches suddenly, and they’ve been getting worse lately. I get nauseated and have to go lie down.”

“Look, I’ll make some calls, see who I can line up at the hospital to take a look at you. We probably should do that this afternoon, before I leave.”

We sat in silence for a few minutes, and then I remembered what I had come for.

We went back into the kitchen, popped a couple more cans of beer, the game forgotten, and went through the sulfurous xeroxes I had made.

Hoover seemed oddly relieved by the information in the newspaper. He didn’t seem particularly concerned to find that

his father—if that's who it was—was dead.

"I hardly remember him," he said. "It's the woman—my mother—that I really remember. I don't think my father was home much. I just have this general impression of him—reddish hair, mustache. I know he was a lot taller than my mother, but I can't even remember the details of his face, or whether he wore glasses or not."

He paused for a minute. "I do remember he had a sort of odd voice, though. Gravelly, and he didn't talk the way other people did. The only thing I really can remember clearly is once when he yelled. It was something like 'Jane, don't TOUCH that GUN.' It never made any sense. I used to think I made it up, like the woman's face and the kitchen. It's hard to tell what's real any more."

Right after I got to work on Monday, I went to check on Hoover. Cristina was with him, her face pale.

"Come on in," Hoover said, spying me in the doorway. "I've just confessed all to my spouse."

"How are they treating you?" I asked.

"Fine. I've got a couple of tests lined up for later this morning, and another one tentatively scheduled for tomorrow,

if today's don't work out."

I was relieved that he'd checked himself in so quickly, but it made it even more urgent now to find out what I could about his parents. His family medical history might be the key to his present problems.

At noon, I sent my secretary out for sandwiches, and locked myself in the office to make some phone calls.

By the time she got back, I had talked to two key people—the director of Wharton Hospital, and the Wharton police chief. Neither of them knew anything about the Svensons, but when I explained what I was after, and who I was, they both agreed to check into it.

John Ramsey, the director of Wharton Hospital, called back shortly before five to tell me he had located some records, and would be sending them along in the mail.

Wednesday was a busy day, and I was surprised when my secretary told me there was a policeman in the reception area to see me. When she told me it was Raymond Thompson, I hesitated. Then she added, "The Wharton police chief," and the name clicked into place. I had her show him in and bring us some coffee.

He was a young man—about thirty—and from the slight ac-

cent I detected, he had grown up in Connecticut. He was friendly enough, but didn't immediately impress me as being particularly brilliant. I soon had to eat my words on that subject.

"Sorry to barge in on you like this," he said, "but it was my day off, and I decided to come into the city. I wanted to talk to you about this case. It's a real puzzler."

He handed me a yellowed folder that contained several reports, a few pages of scrawled notes on lined notepaper, and a set of black and white photos. I glanced through the notes, and was struck by the rawness of the photographs. I suddenly remembered that Hoover was still here in the hospital.

I introduced the two of them in Hoover's room, and filled Hoover in quickly on the reason for Thompson's visit. Thompson handed over the file and Hoover went through it quietly, straining to keep his face impassive. He too paused at the photographs.

Thompson leaned over his shoulder then and pulled one of them out of the stack. "This is the one I find fascinating."

Hoover looked up with interest.

"See anything unusual here?" he asked.

Hoover looked again, then shook his head.

"At the top of the photo, here," he pointed, "we have the man—your father?"

Hoover nodded.

"He's lying on his back. To his left, we have the governor—what is her name? Oh, yes, Margaret Sloane. Also on her back. To her left, we have your mother. In between the two women, as you can see, is the murder weapon."

"From the placement of the murder weapon, it looks as though your mother shot the other two and then turned the gun on herself. At least that's the way it reads in the reports. By the time she recovered enough to be questioned, though, the investigation was dropped. I don't know where that came from, but it stuck. I had a hard time even locating the file. The case is closed, of course, but it piqued my interest."

"To be blunt with you, my gut instinct says the lady didn't do it. I was hoping you could shed some light on the situation."

"I don't think so. We know less about it than you do. But why don't you think she did it?" Hoover asked.

"Well, the general idea you get from these reports is that your mother caught the two of them having an affair and shot them. But they were in the library, and all of them were fully clothed."

"Second, despite the location

of the murder weapon—see how it's right there by Mrs. Svenson's right hand," he said, pointing at the photograph, "the location of her wound was odd."

"How so?" I asked.

"Well, first of all, the medical reports say the bullet went in the left side of her body, angling toward the right, where it lodged near her spinal cord. If she used her left hand to shoot herself, why is the gun found near her right hand?"

He paused for a minute, and smiled a quirky smile. "I'm not an expert on this kind of stuff—Wharton is a peaceful town—but the few cases I have seen, with a gun that heavy, I would have expected a woman to put it in her mouth and pull the trigger with both hands."

Hoover winced.

Thompson continued. "I'm no expert on women, either, but I found it kind of odd that she didn't leave a note or anything. I would think a woman would straighten up the room or something, hire a sitter or call a relative to take the kid before she did something like that. Maybe go into the bathroom to do it so she wouldn't leave a mess. I don't know. It just doesn't feel right to me."

What he said seemed to make sense to both of us.

"What do you think really happened?" I asked.

He shrugged and smiled. "Haven't gotten that far yet," he said. "My bet is on the governess, but there's no motive. Too bad my predecessor died. He was real good on local gossip, among other things."

Hoover's face was scrunched up in thought. "I didn't even know the governess's name. I just called her Nanny. I don't really recognize her in this photo. It's been so many years, and I don't think she was there very long before it happened."

Thompson took out a small notepad and wrote down his name and phone number. "If you think of anything, give me a call," he said. "I'm a big mystery fan."

"Can we keep these?" Hoover asked of the notes and photos.

"No, sorry, I've got to take them back," Thompson said. "No reason you couldn't make copies, though."

I made them myself. I didn't think my secretary, Molly, would appreciate that task.

The envelope from Wharton Hospital arrived on Thursday.

There wasn't much, but it was a start. Karl Svenson had had a complete physical—and I'm talking complete—at just about the time he had moved into the new house. For a new job? Insurance purposes? I wondered.

He was in the best of health. There was less information on Mrs. Svenson's general health—just the usual stuff women go through when they're pregnant—but she seemed healthy enough, too.

I knew Hoover would be relieved that he at least had healthy parents—at one time—although it left no clues to his own problems. I sensed that he secretly would like nothing better than to have a houseful of little munchkins to play with, and I knew Cristina wanted kids.

There was a thick wad of papers clipped together and folded into a rubber band at the bottom of the stack—Mrs. Svenson's bill for her last hospital stay.

I held my breath as I read through them—down to the part where she had been released. At least she had been alive then. It was easy to put together a picture of her treatment. The only things that had changed in billing procedures over the years were computerization and cost.

She had been there for more than a month. There was surgery to remove the bullet, round-the-clock nursing help for two weeks, and then everything slacked off as she stabilized. A couple of specialists had been called in—a surgeon and a psy-

chologist. From what I could figure from the itemized list of services, she had still been paralyzed when she had left, but fit to travel.

There were two items of interest. The first was that the bill was addressed to a Samuel Wilkinson, Esquire, and the second was that Mrs. Svenson had been taken to a very exclusive nursing home just across the state line in New York.

I didn't sleep well that night. My mind was racing. There was still no word from the doctors about what was wrong with Hoover, and I was at a point where I had lots of scraps of information, but the big picture still eluded me.

I thought about the Morans. Hoover's parents had been older than all the other parents on the block, and neither one of them had worked. Mr. Moran was retired, but I never knew what from. They seemed to have about as much money as the rest of us, which wasn't much, and I started to wonder where it came from.

My memories of them were of nice, friendly people who had loved Hoover fiercely, and indulged him, I know, because he would sometimes worry about whether they could really afford his art lessons and supplies. They had accepted me

almost as part of their family, never offended that I couldn't eat with them because we kept kosher, always concerned when I was ill or unhappy, just as they were with Hoover. I had a hard time picturing them in any sinister light, and I knew Hoover must have, too.

But where was the truth? Had someone been paying the Morans to take care of Hoover, or had they really officially adopted him, and just lost the papers? Why hadn't they ever told him he was adopted?

I let the picture shift, and tried to see Hoover through my mother's eyes, and maybe understand why she fussed over him so much. As an adult, of course, she must have seen that he wasn't their real child. I wonder what else she saw, or knew? Unfortunately it was too late to ask her.

So many questions, so few answers.

The woman who answered the phone at the Morehouse Foundation was polite but cool. No, she did not have a patient listing for an Eugenie Svenson, and no, she could not check the records to see if there had been such a patient in the past. All records were confidential.

I wasn't too surprised at that. In recent years, the Foundation

had become a place for the rich and famous to dry out discreetly.

I asked for the director's name, and got connected to her. Elizabeth Morris was also cool at first, but once I had established my credentials—i.e., name-dropped a bit—she warmed up. When I explained the circumstances to her, she agreed to check her files and call me back.

Meanwhile, back in the lab, Dr. Benton was doing another test on Hoover. I had wanted to tell Hoover about the package from Wharton Hospital, so I had decided to walk him back to his room when he was done. I got to the lab just in time to see him fall flat on his face and go into convulsions.

Avery Benton calmly ripped a small vial off his towel dispenser with one hand as his other one was fumbling in the drawer below, and within thirty seconds he had injected Hoover with epinephrine. He knelt by him, checking his pupils, pulse, and respiration, until his breathing became regular again. I could see a series of small scratches along Hoover's bare back, and I figured out what must have happened.

Dr. Benton confirmed my diagnosis after he'd gotten a shaken Hoover back up on the table and examined him for in-

juries during the fall from the table.

"These things can come on pretty suddenly," he said, "and sometimes they go away just as suddenly. It's been a pretty damp spring this year, and a lot of people have been suffering. You're the only one I've had lately that's tried to become deceased during testing, though." He smiled.

Hoover was not so thrilled.

"So what's the diagnosis?" I asked.

"He's allergic to just about everything that blooms in the spring," Dr. Benton said cheerfully.

Hoover looked up. "That's it? I mean, that's all that's wrong with me?"

"Well, you can get pretty miserable from it, as you've probably already noticed."

Hoover's face lit up with relief. "That accounts for the blackouts and everything?"

"Yes, I think so. You've passed all our other tests with flying colors. I can't think of anything more to try."

Hoover's face darkened. "Am I going to conk out like this again?"

"No. That was just from the test. We can make up a special formula to treat your specific allergies, and you can have an M.D. in your neighborhood give you your injections. I can find

you a good doctor out there if you want. Don't worry. It's just tuberculin syringe stuff—very small—and it's given subcutaneously, so it won't hurt."

I don't think Hoover particularly cared about the pain, as long as he could get rid of the headaches without undergoing brain surgery.

When we got back to Hoover's room, I gave him the medical records and explained what they meant. When I was done, Hoover took a sketchpad out of the bedside drawer, perched it on his knees, and began to doodle quietly, digesting the information.

It was a turning point, and I knew he needed some time to think about it. What was on both of our minds was, now that he knew he was fairly healthy—his parents hadn't died of some strange disease in their twenties or anything—whether he really wanted to know any more about them. His mother, from the medical reports, seemed to be alive still, but was she a murderer? Would she want to see her son again?

Then Hoover looked up, his face set. "I've come this far," he said quietly, "I might as well keep at it. I think I'd rather know, even if it hurts."

Hoover went home, and I waited for news from Elizabeth

Morris. A week passed, and I finally got impatient and called her.

She sounded relieved to hear from me. "I wasn't sure whether to call you or not," she said. "I found some information—the name of a lawyer on Mrs. Svenson's bills. I looked up the phone number and called it, and a secretary told me that the lawyer had died but his son had taken over the practice. The son hasn't returned my call yet, though."

She gave me his name: Samuel Wilkinson, Jr.—the same name as on the Wharton Hospital bill.

When I finished talking to her, I called Wilkinson immediately. He seemed cautious, reserved, but he agreed, reluctantly, to see us on Saturday at his office. It meant another trip to Connecticut, but Hoover, who was now fixed up with medication, agreed to risk it.

Wilkinson was a middle-aged man with wavy gray hair and protruding front teeth. I got the impression that he didn't realize that he looked like the Easter Bunny—in fact, thought himself quite attractive to the ladies. He was officious and blustering as he led us into his paneled office and seated us on heavy leather chairs. I had a sudden sense

that this fellow was trying to live up to some image he had of his father, and that he'd rather be doing almost anything else.

By the time we were done, he seemed to have deflated. I sensed that he had recognized something in Hoover that made him accept him for who he said he was.

There was still something held in reserve, and it didn't occur to me what it might be until long after we had left.

Terrill agreed with me later when I voiced my suspicions to her privately. Either there was a large sum of money involved, or he was hiding something else from us.

Wilkinson had told us that Hoover's mother was still alive, still a client of his, but little else. He had agreed to talk to her the next day, tell her about our visit, and see if she wanted to see Hoover. I wondered if he would really pass the information along, and whether we might not have been better off if Hoover had hired his own lawyer to deal with the situation.

Wilkinson had told us that she was not in very good health. She was still paralyzed from the waist down from the bullet wound, and rarely spoke, though there was nothing wrong with her vocal cords. She had been

miserable living in nursing homes, so he had bought her a small house, had it designed to accommodate her wheelchair, and had hired a live-in housekeeper to take care of her.

I had worried needlessly about Wilkinson. Hoover called the next day to tell me that he had called and given him his mother's address. It was near Wharton, in a neighborhood that wasn't fancy—not like State Street—but not shabby either. He had also set up a meeting for the following Saturday at two o'clock at Mrs. Svenson's house.

Hoover began to show his first sign of terror at that point, and the four of us spent so much time on the phone, back and forth, discussing what to wear and what to say, that I felt we were in some time warp, back to junior prom night.

The night before the visit, at about midnight, the phone rang. Terrill and I had been in bed for a while. I picked up the phone, said hello, and heard, "What if she doesn't recognize me?" on the other end of the line. Hoover.

"She's your mother," I said foggily, turning on the bedside lamp and sitting up. "She'll recognize you."

"What if she doesn't like me?" he said then.

"What's not to like?" I said,

chuckling. "My own mother liked you better than she liked me."

"She did not," he said, puzzled. "Did you really think that?" "Sometimes."

"Because she always gave me cookies and stuff?"

"Yeah, that was part of it. She also seemed to worry more about you than she did about the rest of us."

"I always figured your mother just thought I looked hungrier than the other kids," he said, laughing quietly. "It's the story of my life. Women are always trying to feed me something."

"I didn't think you noticed that."

"Yeah. Makes you feel kind of like a Thanksgiving turkey. It's a good thing I don't put on weight."

The house was white frame, a one story ranch, with a fenced-in back yard. It was a quiet neighborhood, and it seemed a peaceful place to live.

Hoover had decided that he couldn't do it alone, so the four of us—with me driving because Hoover was too nervous—had piled in the car and driven up. The route was becoming a familiar one.

Hoover went to the door first, then Cristina, and Terrill and I lagged behind. The woman

who answered it was obviously the housekeeper—a middle-aged, kindly looking woman with the arm muscles of a wrestler, who told us her name was Greta. I would imagine she would need to be strong to care for a woman in a wheelchair.

Terrill had never seen the portraits, but the rest of us recognized Mrs. Svenson immediately. She was older than Hoover had painted her, but the warmth, the sensuous grace, were still there.

Hoover recognized her, and saw that she recognized him. We knew Mrs. Svenson spoke little since the tragedy, and the only word she uttered in that first hour was "Uwe" as she reached out for him.

Hoover and I did most of the talking—stupid things about our childhoods, what we were doing now, where we lived. It wasn't an earth-shattering conversation, but Mrs. Svenson seemed enthralled just to hear Hoover's voice, and all of us were excited that the two of them had finally found one another.

Soon she tired, and Greta took her off for a nap, begging us to stay for a while. No one wanted to leave anyway.

When she returned, she made us some coffee, heated up some fresh rolls, and sat us in the kitchen to talk, where we

wouldn't disturb Mrs. Svenson's nap.

Greta was the only person Mrs. Svenson had to talk to, and it seemed as though she had opened up to her. She told us that she had been given permission to answer any questions that we might have, and, gradually, part of the story came out—at least the part about how she and Hoover had become separated.

Apparently, she told us, when Mrs. Svenson had been shot—and she didn't elaborate on who had done the shooting—the elder Mr. Wilkinson had arranged to have Hoover cared for temporarily by a family he knew in New York. He thought the boy would be safe there until the publicity died down and his mother either recovered or didn't.

Mrs. Svenson was quite ill for some time, and during that period, the elder Mr. Wilkinson died.

At the time of his death, the younger Mr. Wilkinson had been in law school, so his mother arranged for another lawyer—a semi-retired friend of the family—to take over the business until the son finished school.

The friend of the family died shortly after the young man passed the bar, and the business was in disarray for some time. The young Wilkinson

handled Mrs. Svenson's medical bills and routine estate matters well enough, but he was overwhelmed. He had little contact with Mrs. Svenson, but enough to realize that she was unable to care for Uwe, and to decide to continue the arrangement with the Morans until there was some improvement. She had taken the death of her husband badly, and her recovery was slow.

A couple of years later, there was a fire in the building where his office was located, and most of his files were destroyed.

He found himself in a terrible bind. He couldn't remember the names of the people who were caring for Uwe, and neither could anyone else. His father had handled the matter discreetly.

He ended up spending his own money to find Uwe, but to no avail, and he realized only much later that the way he had handled it might have spooked the couple into silence for fear of being prosecuted for kidnapping.

In later years, as Mrs. Svenson recovered, he had become very attentive to her, perhaps out of guilt, and the two of them had continued their efforts to find Uwe.

"I guess that would have been impossible, since my name was completely changed. I never

would have connected Uwe with Hoover if I hadn't found the birth certificate," Hoover said. "So I never was officially adopted?"

"No. You couldn't have been." Her face softened. "I think your parents must have been good people," she said, reaching out for Hoover's hand.

"I have tried many times to figure out what might have happened. When the fire destroyed Mr. Wilkinson's office, he had to close the business for a while. I would suppose that they probably tried to get in touch with him when the checks stopped coming, and found that the phone had been disconnected."

She paused for a moment, lost in thought. "I wouldn't have known what to do at that point. Mrs. Svenson was in several nursing homes over the years, so it would have been almost impossible to locate her, either. But I think if I had no children of my own, and I had grown to love a boy very much, I would have gladly decided to raise him as my own."

She looked up at Hoover. "It must have been difficult for them to live with the fear that you might be taken away from them at any time. From what you have told us about them, I think they must have loved you very much."

Hoover's eyes got a little teary at that, but he nodded.

We talked in the kitchen with Greta for a couple of hours, waiting for Mrs. Svenson to finish her nap, and spent a little more time with her then.

I was glad when Hoover invited his mother and Greta to come down the next weekend and stay with them, and I knew both Terrill and I looked forward to seeing them again.

I was happy for Hoover, of course, but during that next week, I started to feel a profound sense of loss. I guess it was strange, but I had always thought of Hoover as a part of my family, and it was hard to get used to the idea that he suddenly had a new family—one I wasn't a part of.

I felt a lot better when Hoover called on Thursday and invited us over for Sunday dinner. Sort of less left out. Terrill said I was weird, but I knew she understood what I was going through.

I hate to even admit that I thought this, but when we got to Hoover's on Sunday, the first thing I wanted to do was ask him if he'd found out what had really happened in the library that evening. It was an urge that I had to squelch several times during the afternoon.

Things had calmed down in the last week with Hoover and Cristina, and they seemed right at home with his mother. She too had changed. She was starting to talk some now, in liltily accented English, and she was more animated than she had been. I wondered if maybe her not talking had been more a result of shock, and then not feeling she had anyone she could trust, than from any physical cause.

Hoover was learning a lot about his family, in bits and pieces, and his mother was learning a lot about him. After Hoover showed her some of his work, she confessed that she had studied art in school, and had been pretty good, so Hoover, in his mischievous way, challenged her to a duel. He brought out sketchbooks and charcoal, and the two of them went at it for about an hour, with the rest of us cheering them on.

We left late that evening, feeling stuffed but happy. I didn't hear from Hoover again for a couple of weeks. When he called, I got that urge back again to ask him, but decided not to. Maybe he had decided he didn't really want to know. He did say he had some news for me, though, and the way he said it only piqued my curiosity more.

We met again at the restaurant where all of this had started, and again, a bloody Mary was delivered to the table shortly after I arrived.

Hoover was looking healthier and happier all of a sudden. He spent about five minutes stumbling all over himself thanking me for helping him, and finally I just said, "Stop, already. I know you would have done the same for me."

He looked at me then, and sighed. "Well, I owe you a big one."

"Nah. It's on the house."

"I found out about the murders, by the way," he said a short time later, trying to sound nonchalant. "You interested?"

"If you *don't* tell me, I'm going to do you grievous bodily harm," I said. "Being polite and not asking has been killing me."

"It's a strange story. My father was doing some work for the government. He was a physicist. Can you imagine *me* having a physicist for a father?" He laughed.

"It was some top-secret project—even my mother didn't know what it was. He came home a day early from one of his trips to Washington and found some papers missing from his safe.

"He knew my mother wouldn't have gone in his office, and the

only other person who could have taken them was the governess—Margaret Sloane. When he confronted her, she pulled a gun on him. The more I think back on it, that seems to explain why I was allowed to play outside for so long. I guess she knew there was going to be trouble.

"At that point my mother came in, saw what was going on, and tried to wrest the gun out of her hands. That's when I heard the 'Jane, don't touch the gun' business that always stuck in my mind."

"Who was Jane?" I asked.

"Well, it wasn't Jane. If we'd been educated somewhere besides Brooklyn, we might have been able to figure it out a long time ago. My parents were both naturalized Americans—he was Swedish, she was German. Americans usually pronounce her name You-JEEN-ie, but in most European countries it's pronounced Oy-GAIN-ya. She says my father called her GAIN-ya sometimes, and that's probably what I heard."

"So she was trying to save your father's life?"

"Yeah. But she was too late. After that first shot, she and the governess struggled over the gun. My mother got shot, but managed to get hold of the gun and shoot back before she collapsed. My mother says that

Margaret Sloane was apparently neither British nor a governess, but she never found out who she really was, or whom she had been working for."

"What happened after that—I mean, when the charges were dropped and everything?"

"The information that was taken was quite sensitive, and when it became apparent that there had been a leak somewhere, someone managed to figure out what must have happened at our house. Whoever it was straightened things out quietly with the local authorities, and that's why there wasn't too much of a follow-up in the papers."

He stopped for a moment, and thought. "I'm glad about that. It saved my mother a lot of problems, which she didn't need at that point."

"My mother still doesn't know what my father was working on at the time, but she said he was paid very well for it, and she has plenty of money to live on."

He blushed. "You know, you can just tell by the way she talks about my father that she loved him very much."

I hate to sound really emo-

tional or anything, but I felt that that was kind of heart-warming. You know, to find out something special like that about your past.

"Well, that's good news," I said. "At least you won't have to worry about her so much."

"Oh, there's something else I forgot to tell you. Remember the house on State Street—the one you were so impressed by? I showed my mother the paintings I'd done of the kitchen, and she said they were remarkably accurate. And then you know what she said?"

"No, what?"

"That we could have it, if we wanted, after the baby came. It was never sold. Wilkinson's been renting it out all these years."

"Whoa. Wait a minute. I think we're missing a crucial piece of information here. What baby?"

Hoover blushed again. "I forgot to tell you, I guess. Remember when I told you Cristina wanted to start a family, and I was nervous about it? I guess I got a little confused. She wasn't trying to tell me she wanted to start a family—she was telling me we accidentally already had. The baby's due in October."

UNSOLVED

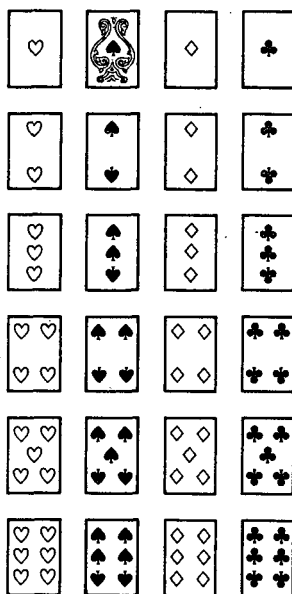
by H. E. Dudeney

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the October issue.

This is a game that used to be (and may be to this day, for aught I know) a favorite means of swindling employed by cardsharps at racecourses and in railway carriages.

As, on its own merits, however, the game is particularly interesting, I will make no apology for presenting it to my readers.



The cardsharp lays down the twenty-four cards shown in the illustration, and invites the innocent wayfarer to try his luck or

skill by seeing which of them can first score thirty-one, or drive his opponent beyond, in the following manner:

One player turns down a card, say a 2, and counts "two"; the second player turns down a card, say a 5, and, adding this to the score, counts "seven"; the first player turns down another card, say a 1, and counts "eight"; and so the play proceeds alternately until one of them scores the "thirty-one," and so wins.

Now, the question is, in order to win, should you turn down the first card, or courteously request your opponent to do so? And how should you conduct your play? The reader will perhaps say: "Oh, that is easy enough. You must play first, and turn down a 3; then, whatever your opponent does, he cannot stop your making ten, or stop your making seventeen, twenty-four, and the winning thirty-one. You have only to secure these numbers to win."

But this is just that little knowledge which is such a dangerous thing, and it places you in the hands of the sharper.

You play 3, and the sharper plays 4 and counts "seven"; you play 3 and count "ten"; the sharper turns down 3 and scores "thirteen"; you play 4 and count "seventeen"; the sharper plays a 4 and counts "twenty-one"; you play 3 and make your "twenty-four."

Now the sharper plays the last 4 and scores "twenty-eight." You look in vain for another 3 with which to win, for they are all turned down! So you are compelled either to let him make the "thirty-one" or to go yourself beyond, and so lose the game.

You thus see that your method of certainly winning breaks down utterly, by what may be called the "method of exhaustion." I will give the key to the game, showing how you may always win; but I will not here say whether you must play first or second: you may like to find it out for yourself.

See page 151 for the solution to the August puzzle.



SOME PEOPLE WOULD KILL

FOR A COPY.

SUBSCRIBE NOW AND SAVE UP TO
33% OFF THE COVER PRICE

CALL TOLL-FREE 1-800-247-2160

(Iowa residents Call 1-800-362-2860)

- ☐ Please send me 18 issues of ALFRED
HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE for only
\$23.97—I save 33% off the newsstand price.
☐ Please send me 12 issues for only \$16.97.

Mail to: **Alfred Hitchcock**
P.O. Box 1932
Marion, Ohio 43305

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

☐ Payment Enclosed ☐ Bill Me

☐ Charge
(Circle one)



Card# _____

Exp. Date _____

Signature _____

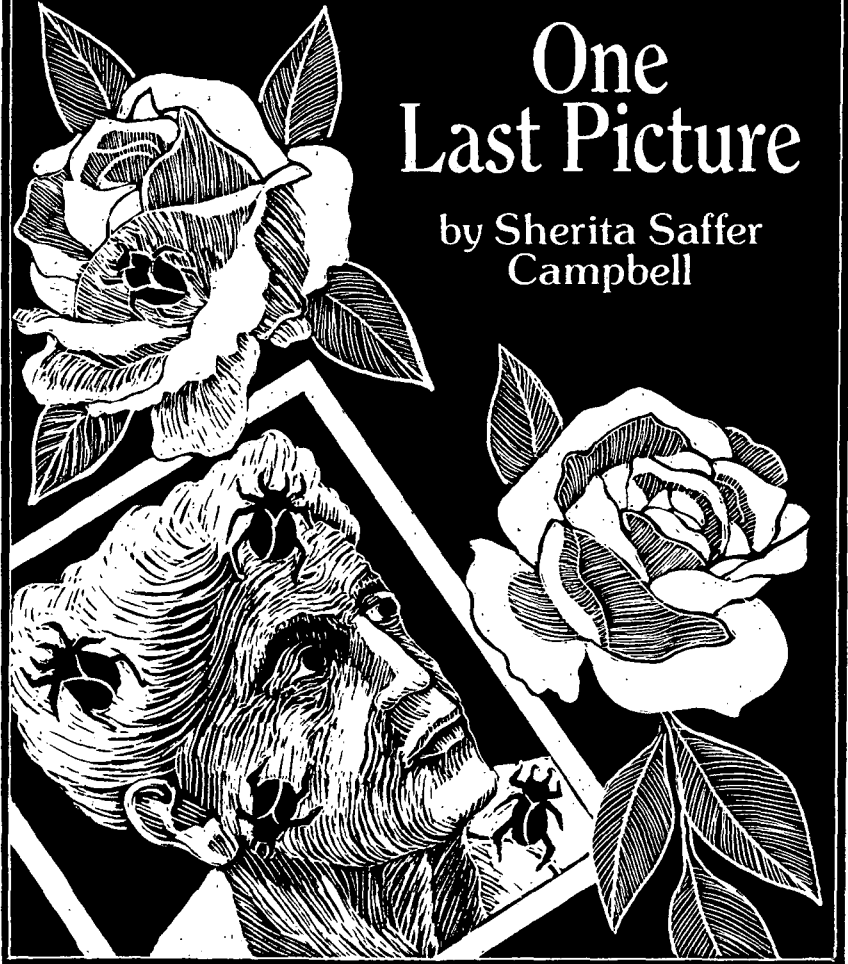
OUTSIDE US & POSS., 12 FOR \$19.97, 18 for \$26.97
(CASH WITH ORDER US FUNDS). PLEASE ALLOW
6-8 WEEKS FOR DELIVERY OF YOUR FIRST ISSUE.

DHJ7H-5

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

One Last Picture

by Sherita Saffer
Campbell



Sadie May Ellison walked around the yard clipping the dead flowers off Mrs. Cramer's rosebushes. The early morning sun was just touching the heavy stone birdbath in the center of the garden. Mrs. Cramer was still asleep. Sadie May clucked her tongue as she looked up at her employer's window in the big brick house and saw the heavy drapes still closed to keep out the morning sun. Sadie May shook her head before she went back to the roses.

It was going to be hot again today. At her age she wasn't sure if it was the heat or the cold which gave her more miseries. The doctor had told her that her arthritic legs were not built for heavy gardening even when she was young, but now she wasn't at all equipped to spend time bending over plants.

The roses were so pretty—pink, red, white, and dripping with dew. They looked almost like shaped party ice cream ready to eat. She glanced again at the window, as if her thoughts could penetrate that darned curtain better than the sun's rays. Roses needed care—mulching, feeding, watering. Sadie May squinted close at the bush she was working on. Aphids again. Mrs. Cramer had said she'd keep them off. . . . She sighed, wishing now she could be heard behind those drapes. Never mind. There'd be the charity ball and Mrs. Cramer was totally absorbed in the June event.

Sadie May walked over to the shed, opened the door, and stepped inside the dark little building. If I had my life to live over, she thought, I'd be a gardener instead of . . . of whatever. Mumbling to herself, she opened the big cupboard and reached behind the large flower pots she used for fall re-potting. She dug out her special mixture for wiping out aphids. She sniffed. Those young landscapers that Mrs. Cramer hired could use what they wanted, they could spray and do all the damage to the flowers they could, but she had always had luck with the mixture old Clyde Bellows stirred up for her at the pharmacy. She shook the can. Old Clyde was in the home now over to Coldwater, and she doubted that young busybody pharmacist knew how to mix up a good cold poultice, let alone a rose aphid killer. Arsenic, Clyde had said, was the secret ingredient. Mixed with enough other things so as not to kill the rosebushes.

Sadie May always made the solution in a Tupperware pitcher she'd bought at some dumb party Mrs. Cramer had made them both go to. Plastic pitchers to put tea and milk in, she thought. The world is going to . . . She tried to think of something awful, then smiled, remembering her father's favorite expression: "The world's going to hell in a red wagon."

Sadie May laughed, then looked around guiltily to see if anyone had heard her. "Parson's still asleep." She looked up at the window again. "So's the boss." Still laughing, she shook her head. "It's true; when you start to sin one way, I guess you just let everything slide."

She went to the rosebush and began to spray the roses with an

antique push thingamagig she'd brought from her house when she'd left it to go to work, all those years ago when her father had found out about . . . Never mind, what's done is done. Mustn't think about it. Except today . . . today was the day . . . June. She was to have been a bride those many years ago. Only . . .

Sadie May pushed the sprayer hard. "Don't get moody and sentimental, my girl," she said aloud to herself. "He jilted you at the church. Well, you never really got that far." There was a sigh. "I reckon in the flesh and in the spirit you never even made it to church." She eyed a beetle, aimed the sprayer, and watched the mist descend on the creature. She paused in mid-spray. "You just sat in that stupid train station all day and all night waiting for some stage-happy tenor who didn't show. And that's that."

Wasn't long before she was showing, though. "Dumb, dumb young woman you was." She walked around the bush looking for more prey. "Whole town knowing I was there. Whole town knowing why, most likely." She shook her head. "Mustn't stir up the past." Let sleeping dogs lie was her mother's motto. Her mother, long dead before the train station episode.

Maybe if her mother had been alive she'd have been told not to wait in the station. Would she have listened? She sprayed harder for a while, then looked again at the object in her hands. "What a thing to keep as a souvenir from my homeplace—a rose sprayer. I could have had the family china."

But Sadie May knew why she had the sprayer. She'd been spraying the roses at home that day when her father found her out and came around the side yard screaming at her. She had left, or he had thrown her out—god, she didn't even remember any more. She'd left carrying only the sprayer and listening to the clackety-clack of the neighbor's lawn mower and the sound of the horses up and down the street. She'd never even ridden in the new motor car her father bought to ride around town in.

They didn't make things that lasted like that sprayer any more. Everyone used them spray cans now. She did, too, sometimes but . . . maybe she used this to remember.

The bell rang and Sadie May knew Mrs. Cramer was up. That was the trouble working for someone else. You never got to do anything you wanted to for very long. She'd gone from job to job for a while after that long ago day. She had no education, no training. She had hoped she could save enough to go to college or to the new vocational school. But she never made enough money. She'd

try to save, then the job would be over and it would be so long before she got another that her small savings would be gone. She'd been lucky when she got this job, with room and board. Reckon the old parson had talked Mrs. Cramer into it.

Sadie May knew she was too old to work, but she wasn't ready for the home and old Clyde, even after he'd saved her that long ago day, from all that bleeding. Old Clyde even offered to marry her for a while. But that train station had taken too much from her. She had no money, not much Social Security if she quit work. She hated the thought of welfare so she'd worked and worked as some sort of companion for ladies; it was the custom then. Only now not many people needed them. Folks just went full blast all alone. Those who would have hired companions to prepare afternoon teas in the old family homeplaces gave the homeplaces to the local university for a tax write-off, then hied themselves off to a luxurious retirement center as a home base for zapping around the world. Women like herself who had no money tried to find work somewhere and make do. Somehow.

She set the sprayer on the workbench beside the pitcher and went into the house. "The breakfast tray for Mrs. Cramer is ready," the cook said, nodding her head toward the table. Sadie mumbled acknowledgment.

"It ain't right she stay in that bed every morning and make you take food to her, not up them steps," Sharon grumbled.

"It's my job."

"You too old to do it. You need to quit."

"I don't . . . know . . . What would I do?"

"Retire and live off your savings, or . . ."

"I don't have any. It's . . ." The bell rang, more insistent this time.

"She hungry," Sharon grinned.

Sadie sighed at the uselessness of explaining the unexplained, picked up the tray, and left.

The stairs weren't bad, only seven of them to the small elevator Mrs. Cramer had had installed. Sadie May smiled. The cook wasn't much younger than her. Whole bunch of them living in this house were not only "past their prime" as she had heard them young folks speak, but their prime was so far back no one remembered it. Cook just liked to fuss over people, Sadie May knew. She and Sharon didn't either of them have a family or a home.

"I reckon we'd just go to the home with Clyde Bellows, and I just

don't like that one bit," she sighed as she rounded the corner into the bedroom.

"Don't like what one bit?" asked Mrs. Cramer as Sadie May carried the tray to the bed.

"Going to the home, me and Sharon."

"What home are you and Sharon going to?" asked Mrs. Cramer, fluffing her pillows. "Have you seen my atomizers and my asthma medicine?"

"Your glasses are on the stand. If you'd put them on, you could . . ."

"Don't get uppity," scowled Mrs. Cramer. "I thought I had my glasses on. I can't seem to see any better with them on than with them off. That's a sign, I guess; I could talk to the doctor again." There was a shishing sound as Mrs. Cramer sprayed her throat. "There. Now I'll have my tray."

Sadie May placed the tray over the old woman's comforter-enveloped legs.

"Now, whose home, dear?"

"I was thinking if me and Sharon retire we wouldn't have nothing to do or nowhere to go, except the home where Clyde Bellows is."

"Nonsense, dear. There's the Masonic home at Fairmont, the Elks home at Crawfordville . . ."

"No. We'd have to go to the old folks home because we won't have no money."

"How many times must I remind you that your home is here with me?" retorted Mrs. Cramer. "Am I working you too hard? If I am . . . this coffee is cold."

"That's the milk."

Mrs. Cramer peered into the cup. "Why, of course."

"I was out in the yard working on the roses. You promised to keep the roses . . ."

"And you promised to stay out of the yard so often," Mrs. Cramer interrupted. She took a noisy slurp of her coffee. "Today's the day I have to finish with the committee about the ball. I'll be gone all day, so you and Sharon rest."

"Sharon has the rest of the day off."

"You want to come with me? No, that's right; that young man is coming."

"What young man?"

"Well, my dear." Mrs. Cramer stirred her coffee. "I'm sure I don't know, but you got that letter, and a phone call. Some distant relative."

Sadie May sat down. "I'd forgotten."

"How could you forget a visitor? I mean, well, I do believe in all the years you've been here that's the only visitor you've had except the parson. Maybe the lawyer when your father died."

"I guess . . . I guess I'd better lay out your clothes for today," Sadie changed the subject.

"Hmmm. I'll wear the light gray summer suit."

"You wore that last time."

"I like my summer suit. I feel . . . prominent. Besides, the late Mr. Cramer liked it."

Mrs. Cramer's voice faded in and out as Sadie laid out the clothes. She'd forgotten about the young man coming today. Today was her day. Her wedding day, if that damned hussy Lilly hadn't grabbed off the tenor. Now that wasn't fair. She'd never heard what happened. She just knew it was Lilly told her father about . . . the other. That meant Lilly took the tenor.

Sadie May finished her task and went to her own room, leaving Mrs. Cramer to dress herself. She dug around in the desk searching for the letter she'd wadded up in anger after she'd read it. Finding it, she spread it out on the desktop and pressed and smoothed it so she could read it once again.

"Dear Mrs. Ellison," the letter said, "my name won't mean anything to you, but I'm doing a series of pictures for a magazine and I'll be in the neighborhood. My grandmother was Lilly Wrench. You and she used to be friends."

Sadie May looked out the window as she heard Mrs. Cramer bubbling around in her room. She re-read the letter, then looked again at the roses. Well, she didn't know what he wanted. Him and that grandmother of his. Apples don't fall far from the tree.

She put the crumpled letter back in the desk drawer.

His grandmother had been her closest friend, the only one she'd told about her pregnancy before Lilly left for the stage. Became a big star on the vaudeville circuit, she had. Then just dropped out of sight. Sadie May never heard if or who she married. Back then, with no TV, fan magazines, or, she sniffed, gossip papers, you never knew what happened to people.

"Wonder how he found me?" No matter. Mustn't think about it.

Sadie May took elevator and stairs down to the garden again. The sun was higher now, and the birds were darting in and out of the birdbath. She smelled the sweet, almost funereal, smell of the roses. "More aphids." She made a face, picked up two of them, and squished them between her fingers, watching the gray goo drip on

the velvet petals of the roses, marring their beauty with ugliness, the way her day had been marred. She wanted to work in the garden while Mrs. Cramer was gone and not talk to young scallywags.

She went hastily to the shed and got her sprayer again. She began to walk around the roses, spraying and mentally naming each aphid Lilly. A few she named after Lilly's grandson. Two or three times she peered down close and labeled the pests Mrs. Cramer. She was busily enjoying herself and had succeeded in putting aside the awfulness of the day when she glanced towards the back stoop and saw a young man. Lilly's grandson, no doubt.

"Hey there, Mrs. Ellison?" He walked toward her and extended his hand.

She shook it. Shaking hands, she thought. In my day . . . Aloud she asked, "It's right hot. Would you like some lemonade?" Remembering he was young, she added, "Cookies?"

He nodded.

"Well, go on in the house; I'll just clean up." She watched as he went through the door. "Just go on into the sitting room. I'll be right along. Make yourself to home."

The sprayer was empty so she went to the shed and laid down the antique, also taking off her gloves. The pitcher, however, was still partially full. Best take that into the house with me or else I'll forget when he leaves what I was doing, like as not, she thought.

Sadie May set the pitcher on the kitchen counter and washed her hands before rummaging around in the refrigerator for lemons.

"Mind if I come in here?" asked the young man from the other room.

"Course not. What's your name again?"

"William. I was named after my grandfather, William Gaither, the Irish tenor."

She was proud that she stopped halving the lemon in time to avoid slicing her hand. Then she continued, putting each section on the glass juicer and twisting it around and around. Wish this was Lilly's damn neck, she thought. She strained the pungent liquid as she poured the juice into a glass pitcher.

"Tenor singer, was he?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"On the stage?"

"Yes, ma'am. Grandma said you knew him, too. Said both you and her chased him and chased him until she got him."

“Umm.” Sadie May measured the sugar carefully into the lemon juice.

“Gram is still alive and would sure like to see you and your children. She’s got five children and fifteen grandchildren and thirty-eight great-grandkids.”

“I never married.” Sadie May said it simply, quietly. How to tell him her disgrace. Soiled goods, her father had said. Wouldn’t do to take on in front of him.

“Oh. She thought you could come and swap stories. She likes to talk about the stamina of young girls now. She was in labor six hours for my mother. She said Mama was so contrary, had a mind of her own even about being born.”

While he talked she watched the sugar disappear into the yellow liquid. She thought of that dark alley she’d walked down all alone. Those long dark stairs that went on forever. She’d bled for a long time after. Old Clyde had worked hard to save her.

“I had a time finding you,” she heard the boy say. “Finally I went to the church.”

She started to turn on the water. In reaching out, she touched the bright orange Tupperware pitcher.

“Yes, Grandmother thought you’d probably have a dozen children and ought to have grandchildren my age, too.”

As he droned on she poured the orange pitcher’s contents into the glass one and stirred carefully. Then she turned on the cold water.

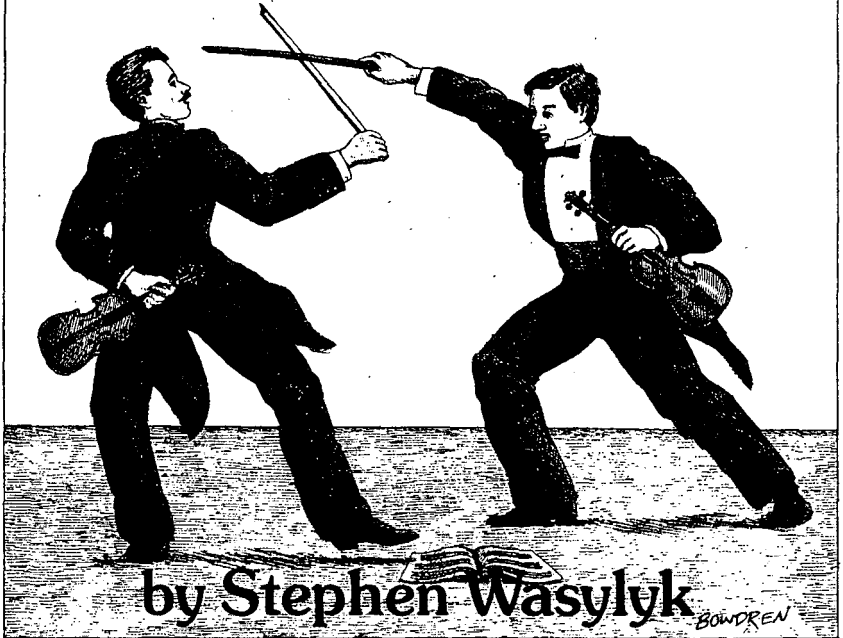
“Would you get some ice cubes out of the refrigerator?” Her voice sounded natural. “Put them in those two glasses.”

She set out a good silver tray and carefully put the pitcher on it. William set the glasses down.

“I’d like to get a picture of you for Grandmother,” he said. “Should I take it now, or after we have the lemonade?”

Sadie May paused, looking at the pitcher. “I think,” she said, “you’d better take the picture before we drink the lemonade.”

Musicians Don't Kill Each Other



by Stephen Wasylyk

The harsh ringing of his phone slowly dragged Hoke Beckett up through layers of sleep until he opened his eyes to the televised reality of several bald-headed men solemnly solving the problems of the world with polysyllabic words. Silencing their collective wisdom with an irritated poke of

his remote control, he lifted the receiver with the resignation of a man whose life was built around phone calls that ended pleasant dreams with real-life nightmares.

"Beckett."

"This is Spocker, Hoke. A violinist named Holloway was killed at the Concert Hall, ev-

idently there for orchestra rehearsal. No real reason for you to come over, but Tolley insisted I give you a call."

The mantel clock said nine; the night outside the window was warm.

"Nice going, Spocker. After interrupting the only sleep I've had in the last twenty-four hours, I find you're just circling the wagons in case Captain Tolley asks if you called."

"Sorry, Hoke, but aren't you the guy who told me years ago to never fail to protect my rear?"

Beckett smiled. "Exactly what do you have?"

"The orchestra was well into the first selection when he was found. No one thought it unusual that Holloway's chair was empty. You know these amateur organizations. The people all have jobs and those come first. Greevy, the maintenance man, left the office at the side entrance to check on the emergency doors on the other side of the hall. He went down, started across that prop storage room under the stage, and found the body. Nicholson says Holloway died from a blow to the back of the skull. Everything from the position of the wound to its depth indicates that Holloway was clubbed with something heavy that had a narrow edge, but then Nicholson isn't the medical examiner."

The lab genius had a way of putting things together. He was probably right.

"No, but he's a great deal smarter."

"I agree. That's why he and a couple of uniforms are going through the stuff in that prop room. He insists anyone who wanted to hide something would toss it in there. He's probably right about that, too. The place hasn't been cleared out since the Concert Hall opened."

Beckett had been in the storeroom. It was crammed with the accumulation of forty years of stage presentations by the theater group and the opera company.

"Time of death?"

"Naturally not confirmed yet, but Nicholson says about five."

Beckett rolled his head, hearing the bones snap, crackle, and pop like a bowl of breakfast food. At least the headache that had nagged him all day was gone.

"I'll come over. You may not need me, but I have to go out anyway to get something to eat."

"Your lifestyle is the greatest argument in favor of getting married I've ever seen," said Spocker. "And speaking of getting married, Crystal Carpenter and Toni Ewing are back. I saw them go by in the Rolls this afternoon. Instead of com-

ing here, why don't you go out there?"

"Spocker," said Beckett, "since you've learned to protect your rear, remember that when you pass important information on to your supervisor, do so without comment so that you can never be held accountable for anything that may result."

"That sounds like a fancy way of telling me to mind my own business."

"Life is a continual learning process," said Beckett.

The concrete block structure on the edge of town called the Concert Hall had been erected with a minimum of funds. Except for the marquee, the exterior was totally without decoration, the architect preferring to spend the money on the inside for good acoustics and seating. Beckett liked his philosophy. When the house lights dimmed and the audience was transported to a different dimension through music or fine acting, who in the hell cared what the outside of the building looked like? No one, it seemed, except the political powers, who found the building too ugly to claim as an example of tax dollars well spent. The architect had never received another county commission.

Beckett entered through the

side door, munching on a hamburger held in his right hand, cradling a boxed one in his left, thinking that the dietary experts who crusaded so religiously against the deleterious effects of fast food were wasting their time. The populace would never believe that anything that tasted so good could possibly be bad for you.

He chewed slowly as he mounted the steps. It had been eighteen months since he'd been in the hall. The place brought back memories he'd been trying to avoid.

Propped against a filing cabinet in the glass enclosed office, Spocker was writing in a small notebook, one of those cherubic individuals completely lacking a sharp edge in face and body. The same couldn't be said about his mind.

A short, heavy, bald man in green work clothing was seated at a desk. Arms folded protectively around a slim leather attaché case, a tall, chisel-faced man with wavy iron-gray hair and wearing an expensive blue suit leaned against the wall.

Spocker glanced at Beckett's hamburgers. "The way you live will make me a lieutenant before I'm forty — which isn't the way I'd like to get the promotion."

Beckett took another bite. "If it happens that way, take the money and run."

Spocker motioned. "Bartram Wheeler, the president of the orchestra."

The blue-suited man nodded. "I've heard of you, lieutenant. In view of your reputation, I hope you find the solution to this terrible tragedy quickly."

"We'll try," said Beckett.

"Ambrose Greevy," said Spocker. "He found the body."

The man at the desk shook his head. "I wish I hadn't."

Beckett finished his hamburger. "So does whoever killed him. How did you get lucky?"

"There are usually a few people in the audience when the orchestra rehearses. Friends, relatives—"

"And interested people like me," said Wheeler.

Greevy shrugged. "They sometimes use the side exit doors and leave them open. With one of those doors open, anyone can come into the hall and I'd never know, so I like to check every so often. I can't cross the stage with the orchestra playing, so I'll go down and across in front or go under the stage and come up on the other side. That's how I went tonight, and there the poor guy was. At first I thought he was a drunk or a bum who had wandered in through one of those open doors and had gone to sleep. Except it was the kid from the orchestra and there was no question

that he was dead. I didn't say a word to anyone because I knew a lot of them would run down there and you wouldn't want that. I just called you people."

"We were here in ten minutes," said Spocker. "I used some uniforms to keep them in their chairs and took Scott, the conductor, down." He nodded at Wheeler. "Mr. Wheeler came along. They identified Holloway and went back up to inform the orchestra. Holloway's wife is a member, too. Thin, high-strung type. Went to pieces and had to be sent to the hospital. There are almost eighty people in the orchestra and questioning all of them would take until four in the morning, so I took the conductor's stand and asked anyone who thought they could contribute something to step forward. As for the rest, I told them we had their names and addresses and would get around to them. Hendryx took the names of the ten or twelve people in the audience."

He handed Beckett a list.

"The ones I talked to told me nothing that could help, other than that Holloway usually came here directly from his job in the music store in the mall, so I sent Hendryx over there to see what time he left. He's still out. No one could believe the killing was anything but a mis-

take or the work of a nut. They could be right. It certainly wasn't robbery. His wallet wasn't touched."

Wheeler cleared his throat. "A talented young man. I can't imagine why anyone would possibly want to kill him."

"How about those doors that sometimes get left open, Greevy?"

"I couldn't swear that it didn't happen, lieutenant."

"But you *would* know who came in through the stage door and when."

Greevy shook his head. "You even have me there. The stage managers came in before five and I gave them a hand setting up the chairs and music stands. Hell, I didn't worry about leaving the door. These musicians are never any trouble. They come in, go down to the locker room, and then come back up to the stage. No horsing around. Scott won't stand for it. He's all business."

"We try to run the orchestra that way," said Wheeler. "It's an amateur organization only in the sense that the members don't receive a salary."

"I questioned both stage managers," said Spocker. "Murdock and Parsons. When they finished, they went out about six thirty for dinner. We'd already found the body when they returned."

"Anyone else here early?"

"I arrived at six," said Wheeler. "Murdock, Parsons, and Greevy were the only people here. The two librarians arrived with the music and started to distribute it, and the others drifted in after them. With the exception of Holloway and three members who are ill, everyone was in place at seven when Scott took the podium."

He pushed away from the cabinet. "If you no longer need me, lieutenant—"

Spocker's voice showed annoyance. "I have your statement."

Wheeler ignored him. "I've called a meeting of the directors and officers at my home. Even if we decide it wouldn't be in bad taste for the concert to go on as scheduled, it's questionable if the members would appear for practice. Many expressed a fear that can only be eased by the apprehension of the killer."

Beckett nodded. "If we need you, we know where to find you."

He stressed the *we* because he knew why Spocker was annoyed. Wheeler headed a successful brokerage firm that handled the portfolios of many of Meridian's wealthiest, and considered only the top people to be on his level. Spocker didn't qualify. Beckett didn't know if

he did, either, but beyond him was only Tolley.

He turned to Spocker after the door closed. "Reporters?"

"Been here and gone. If anything breaks tonight, the man covering headquarters will get it."

Beckett pointed at Greevy. "You stay here. No one gets in unless he has a badge."

"If you say so, but what are you going to do with that hamburger? Eat it or what?"

Beckett handed it to him. "With my compliments."

Greevy took a bite. "Almost cold." He peeled back the top. "And no pickle. A hamburger's gotta have pickle, Beckett."

Beckett grinned. "Nice to have a gourmet in the crowd." He turned to Spocker. "You're pretty sure the murder weapon is still here when you had eighty musicians, almost all of whom would be carrying instrument cases, leave after the body was found."

Munching the hamburger, Greevy tapped his forehead. "Spocker is smart. Don't you know that? He stood at the door and went through every case as the musicians left, and that included Scott's portfolio, which annoyed the conductor no end. He also made the women carrying large handbags open them up. Now maybe somebody did carry out the murder weapon,

but none of the men had sagging pockets and the way women dress, none of them could have concealed it."

"The two stage managers left before the body was found."

"Forget it. I saw them both go and neither was carrying a thing."

Beckett raised his eyebrows at Spocker.

Spocker grinned. "I'm teaching him the trade. The only thing that left here without being opened was Wheeler's briefcase, and I hefted that when he wasn't looking. Nothing heavy enough inside to have killed Holloway."

"You can count on it," said Greevy. "It's still in the building."

"Unless someone opened one of those side emergency exits and simply tossed it out, then went around later and picked it up."

Spocker groaned.

Greevy waved the hamburger cheerily. "Now I see why he's the lieutenant and you're the sergeant, Spocker."

"I'll check even though it might be too late," said Spocker.

He strode off past the electrical control panel where eighteen months ago a man named Kane had come close to blowing up Crystal Carpenter at the soprano's annual fund-raising concert, along with the conduc-

tor, the orchestra, half the audience, and all of the people in the wings like Beckett, and would have succeeded if Toni Ewing hadn't kept her head.

Beckett had liked that performance by the dark-haired secretary, but then Beckett liked the dark-haired secretary even before the performance, and something might have come of it, given time; time for the gears of two different lifestyles to mesh without the clashing and grinding that destroys any relationship.

Six months hadn't been enough for her to become accustomed to his being late or breaking dates, or for Beckett to find a common ground with the people she knew.

Perhaps a lifetime wouldn't have been enough, which was why, when Crystal Carpenter left for New York to become a consultant for a corporation sponsoring opera broadcasts, he hadn't asked the retired diva's secretary to stay.

A heavy-set man in a plaid sports jacket bounded up the stairs, stopping short when he saw Beckett.

"Knew you couldn't stay away, Hoke."

It might have been his imagination, but it seemed that the needling by Spocker, Hendryx, and Nicholson that he never let them handle anything by them-

selves was getting a little serious.

"Find out what time Holloway left the store?"

Hendryx nodded. "Four thirty on the dot. He rang out with a man named Burney who said Holloway was excited about meeting someone to discuss an inheritance from an aunt who recently died. Burney had no idea what it was. I knew Mrs. Holloway would, so I stopped in at the hospital on the way back, but she's so tranquilized we won't be able to talk to her until morning. There was a couple there named Lane who claimed to be the Holloways' best friends. They knew about the aunt, but nothing about a legacy. I asked the doctor to call if Mrs. Holloway came around before morning. He said he would but he didn't think it would happen."

The checkout time would put Holloway at the hall at almost five, which was when Nicholson had estimated he'd been killed, and at five the two stage managers and Greevy had been busy on stage, which explained why no one had seen him come in. Or his killer.

"Spocker is outside looking for the murder weapon," said Beckett. "Take over for him. I'll be downstairs with the genius."

The concrete steps ended in a blank wall, a corridor to the

right. The last time he'd been there, Beckett had gone over the place thoroughly. The door to the storage room was only a few steps down the hall, a locker room a few paces beyond that. The prompter's box at the foot of the stage could be entered only by a flight of steps in the storage room, and that, to Beckett's knowledge, was the only reason for anyone except the stage crew to enter it. The musicians had no reason at all.

Holloway's body hadn't been put there without thought. If Greevy hadn't found it when he did, there was no telling how long it would have remained undiscovered.

Breathing bumping sounds that could have been a Bach minuet, Nicholson, who was built like a conductor's baton, was waving his arms at two sweating, shirtsleeved patrolmen moving the props and furniture used in stage productions, as though Bach would make the job easier or less dirty.

He glanced at Beckett. "We can do without you, you know."

"So you've all been telling me. Ready to arrest someone?"

"Not yet. Can tell you he wasn't killed here, though. Found a few carpet fibers caught in the heel of one shoe, and the waxed surface of the hallway tile shows something was dragged in here from the locker

room. The guy probably pulled him with one hand and carried his violin with the other."

"Why not a woman?"

"Too much physical effort unless she's the current female iron-pumping champion, and you don't find too many of those hanging around symphony orchestras, even amateur ones."

"There are a couple of big people in the orchestra."

"Hey, musicians don't kill each other. You can't live with good music and be capable of murder."

"Maybe not, but like anyone else, a musician can suddenly begin playing music only he can hear or blowing into the wrong end of his horn. Where's Holloway's violin?"

Nicholson pointed. "The grained surface on the case won't hold prints, but I'll try anyway when I check the instrument."

Spocker joined them. "No weapon outside, Hoke."

"My unerring instinct for projecting likely human behavior says it's here," said Nicholson. "Trust me."

One of the uniformed men yelled.

Almost concealed by the swan boat used in a production of *Lohengrin* was a slightly rusted iron bar about two feet long, almost an inch wide, and approximately an eighth of an

inch thick. There was a square hole at one end. A dark stain discolored the other.

Nicholson took photos, measured, pulled on a glove, gingerly picked it up with two fingers, and encased it in plastic.

"Not exactly your classic blunt instrument," said Spocker. "If he'd hit Holloway with the flat surface, he'd have done nothing but bend the bar and stun him, but by hitting him with the edge, he cracked his skull. Maybe he didn't intend to kill him."

Nicholson shook his head. "No way. Accidental death is out. The trauma is almost exactly in the center of the skull, which says the guy held the bar in both hands and brought it down as if he was chopping wood. He may have done it in a fit of rage, but the intent was there."

"I'll take your word for it," said Spocker. "Now all we need is what that thing is, who used it, and why. What do you think, Hoke?"

"I think it's fortunate that I didn't decide to go back to sleep. Genius, get that thing safely into the van before something happens to it. Rusted or not, it may have a print or two. Spocker and I will be in the locker room."

Since the musicians required

a place to leave their coats and instrument cases and in which to relax at intermission, one of the sponsoring business concerns had contributed the tall tan lockers that lined three walls of the room next door, together with the soft brown rug that covered the concrete floor. Another had provided the table and chairs that occupied the center. A disconnected automatic coffee maker sat on a small table in a corner alongside a cooler that dispensed bottled spring water.

Beckett started at one end of the row of lockers, opening and closing doors. Halfway around the room, he turned a handle that sounded tinnier than the others and swung the door wide.

Spocker said softly, "You've got it, Hoke."

The doors of the lockers were held closed by iron bars that slid into slots at the top and bottom when the handle was rotated. The upper bar was missing from this locker, the small rivet that attached it to the handle worn through.

"Probably fell off and was lying here," said Beckett. "See if Greevy knew about it."

He found Holloway's name taped to a locker door. If Holloway kept anything inside, it was gone.

He ran a speculative toe over the deep, rich brown of the rug.

Nicholson spoke from the door. "I've already checked for stains, but I don't have the chemicals I need with me. I'll bring them over tomorrow. If the stains are there, it won't matter when I find them."

Beckett eyed the waste receptacle placed alongside the water cooler to receive discarded paper cups; one of those with a triangular top and a swinging door. He lifted the entire top and swung it back.

A half-dozen cone-shaped paper cups lay in the shadowed bottom of the brown plastic liner. And something else.

Blending with the dark brown and almost invisible in the deep shadow was a reddish-brown fiber portfolio of the type often used by musicians to carry their sheet music. Beckett pulled it out. Battered through years of use, the corners almost worn through, it had become a candidate for the trash basket years ago, and he wondered why it had survived this long. He folded back the large flap and spread the pocket.

Partially accordioned and crammed into the bottom was a yellowed sheet of paper, left behind when the portfolio had been emptied because it had become securely wedged.

He flattened it out carefully on the table. He'd never learned to read music so the symbols

and the notes meant nothing to him, but their irregularity did. This was not a printed page. It was a manuscript.

"Damn," said Nicholson. "I checked that trash can, but I was looking for a weapon. I never saw that thing in there."

"Now you know why I can't get any sleep," said Beckett. "Tell me what it says."

Nicholson traced the notes with a finger. "Part of a score for a piano piece, but I don't recognize it. We'll need a professional. But it's old—"

"And may be why Holloway was killed. If it was the motive, whoever took it knows by now that a folio is missing and may make life easy for us by coming back for it."

He handed the sheet to Nicholson. "Take this to the lab, but replace that portfolio in the bottom of the trash bag. I wouldn't want him to be disappointed."

At midnight, he sat in his office, a copy of the sheet on his desk.

Greevy had said the bar had fallen off at the last rehearsal and he had placed it on the table to remind himself to repair the locker, and had promptly forgotten about it.

Time might clean up the scenario, but what must have happened was that Holloway

had inherited the composition and had met someone in the locker room at five to discuss it. Whoever he had met had killed him and dragged the body into the storeroom. In hastily removing the composition from the old portfolio, the killer never noticed a page had been left behind. After cramming the portfolio into the bottom of the trash bag, he'd walked through the storeroom and up the stairs on the far side of the stage, never seen by Greevy or the two stage managers, and out one of the side exits Greevy worried about. If he was a member of the orchestra he could have returned later with the others. If he wasn't, he simply kept going. The motive wasn't quite clear, but if Holloway had been killed for that composition, it had to have great value and the missing page decreased that value. The man had no choice but to return to check that portfolio. The question was when.

The number of people who had keys amazed Beckett. Since there was really nothing to steal in the place, almost everyone who had ever requested one had one, which was why he had to leave Spocker and Hendryx staked out inside.

He closed his eyes. Spocker, Nicholson, and Hendryx. Wanting to be cut loose, to be left on their own, but always missing

something, forgetting something. Not that he was perfect. He made as many mistakes as anyone, but one mistake he never made was to assume anything, and the day he did that, he'd know it was time to take some of his accumulated leave.

He dozed off, and again the sharp ringing of the phone woke him.

The voice was soft and familiar. "I just won a bet with Crystal, Beckett. I told her that no matter when I called your office, you'd be there. Don't you ever sleep?"

Beckett smiled. "Only when I disconnect the phone. In view of the hour, I could ask you both the same question."

"We come from a world of night people who spend their lives performing in the evening. By the time they wind down, have dinner, and relax, it's well into morning. It's a habit Crystal can't break, even in retirement."

Beckett toyed with the manuscript copy. "Can I assume both of you are wide awake and alert?"

"Far more than you, I'm sure."

"Then I'll be right over. I have a problem that one of you might be able to help with."

"Still carry your problems wherever you go."

"Don't we all? Make sure the coffee is hot."

Toni must have been watching for headlights in the driveway because she opened the door before he reached it. Her hair was cut shorter and arranged differently, but the smile was still in the blue eyes and the warmth in her voice.

She held out her hands. "I missed you, Beckett. I spent a great deal of time wondering if I could have you arrested for not calling or writing."

"If the law existed, we'd both be guilty of breaking it."

Her head cocked questioningly. "Are you saying we wasted a year because of one of those I-won't-call-her-if-she-doesn't-call-me misunderstandings?"

"I thought you were enjoying yourself too much to bother."

Her voice was filled with wonder. "You know so little about women, half the females in the county ought to be able to commit murder with impunity."

"I'm always willing to learn. Instruction can begin at dinner tonight."

She smiled. "You have a deal. Come on in."

Crystal Carpenter was still regal, heavy, and blonde, the no-nonsense eyes checking him from head to toe.

"When we first met, I thought you were the sloppiest excuse

for a policeman I'd ever met until Captain Tolley told me why. I assume the reasons are still the same. No sleep, no time to shave, virtually living in that monstrous Municipal Building."

"Tolley lied," said Beckett. "This is the real me."

Crystal smiled. "You may be sloppy, but you're always interesting. Toni said you had a problem we could help with."

He handed her the copy.

"The original is old, quite yellow, and obviously handwritten. I think it's one folio of a complete score someone considered so valuable he murdered for it. I hoped you might be able to identify it so at least I'd know what I'm looking for."

Her voice was already sliding up and down the notes. She shook her head and handed it to Toni.

"Might as well play it."

Beckett sank into a soft chair and closed his eyes.

A broken finger had ended Toni's concert career, but if it affected her playing, Beckett couldn't tell how. The notes rippled, rose, and cascaded, ending abruptly. She ran through it several times.

"The melody isn't familiar, but the style is," said Crystal.

Toni sighed. "There's a touch of genius to it."

"Touch of romance, too," said

Crystal. "It must be a pretty little waltz."

"Find it, Beckett," said Toni. "I'd really like to play the rest."

"That's it?" he asked. "I come out here at one in the morning and all you can tell me is that it's a romantic little waltz?"

"What did you expect?" demanded Crystal. "The biography of the composer from one sheet of music? Let's have coffee and talk about it."

Beckett returned the copy to his pocket. "Suppose it is valuable. Where could it be sold?"

"Overtly, at any of the large auction houses. Covertly, to any unscrupulous collector. But you are too accustomed to people who steal for profit. Whoever took it might simply want to possess it. Where did it come from?"

"I believe the murdered man inherited it from an aunt."

"Perhaps he was murdered because he wouldn't sell it."

Toni returned with a tray.

"There's your motive, Beckett. Monetary value notwithstanding, someone wanted that manuscript. He may have tried to buy it, was refused, and killed to get it."

"You two are a big help. I was looking for an ordinary thief. Now I don't know who I'm looking for."

"Sure you do," said Toni. "A musician."

"According to Nicholson, musicians don't kill each other."

Crystal laughed. "The good ones don't. They're certain of themselves and their talent. What you want is someone on the fringes, a person who loves music but lacks genuine talent and finds fulfillment by associating himself with it in some manner."

"Such as directors, officers, sponsors, librarians, stage managers."

"Some might fit the classification. I think you'll find many of the people associated with music are more knowledgeable than the musicians, and it wouldn't be surprising for your victim to have consulted one."

"Thank you," said Beckett. "You've added approximately thirty suspects to my list. I'm leaving before you two get me into more trouble."

"You forget Madame Carpenter—"

Beckett held up a hand. "Madam Carpenter?"

"*Madame*," emphasized Crystal. "An honorary title reserved for fat old sopranos who can no longer hit the high notes, not the enterprising ladies of your acquaintance."

Beckett grinned.

"If you two are through needling each other, I want to point out that we know everyone in Meridian connected with mu-

sic," said Toni. "Finish your coffee and take a nap while we narrow that number down considerably."

Beckett took her at her word. He settled back and closed his eyes.

She gently shook him awake, her smiling face far more preferable than the jarring ringing of a phone.

"Your prime suspects are down to five, which doesn't mean one is guilty but gives you a place to start. Each collects something connected with music, so they all have a good idea of value."

The first name was Wheeler, the second Dunhill, the historian of the orchestra. The third man had been on Spocker's list of people in the audience. He'd met the man at a small party given by Crystal, one of the few guests—he'd been comfortable talking with at those little soirees. The man had once studied piano but had given it up to go into business, but that wasn't what interested Beckett.

He had yet to hear from Spocker. That puzzled him. When the killer found a page missing, he'd realize it was probably lying in the trash on its way to destruction, and the risk of going back would seem minimal after he'd killed to get the manuscript. He should have moved as soon as Greevy closed

up, but then he might be waiting for those deserted hours before dawn when even the night people were asleep.

Unless he was one of the few who didn't have a key.

Or unless he knew he could get his hands on that portfolio with no risk at all.

He'd wait and see. Spocker and Hendryx could finish out the night at the Concert Hall, but if the man didn't show up, he'd know why.

Toni was amused. "Do you now fall asleep standing up, Beckett?"

"Leave the man alone," said Crystal. "I have the feeling I'm about to lose a name from my guest list." She pointed. "Not you, Beckett. Seeing you squirm in a tuxedo always makes my day."

Spocker was in one car, he in another, bracketing the rear of the Concert Hall at ten. Spocker had been blunt. Lack of sleep is getting to you, Hoke, he'd said. You've picked the wrong man.

Greevy came out carrying a brown plastic trash bag which he slung into a small dumpster. A few minutes later a huge trash truck pulled up and backed into position. The driver attached the two arms that lifted and tilted the dumpster, but before raising it, he reached in-

side, searched through Greevy's trash bag, and extracted the red portfolio.

Beckett looked at Spocker. The sergeant shrugged.

They were waiting when the driver turned.

He was tall, wearing dark blue coveralls with *Adami* stitched over the breast pocket. He spoke with a slight Southern accent.

"Can I help you boys?"

"I'll take that portfolio," said Beckett.

"The hell you will. Mr. Adami told me to keep my eye out for it, and he's the boss."

Beckett held out his badge.

The man stared. "Did I do something wrong?"

"No," said Beckett. "It looks like Mr. Adami did."

The portfolio on the seat beside him, he drove to Adami's office. Damn, he liked the man. Adami had gone into the trash business with a battered truck he'd bought by selling everything he owned. The six now parked in the yard behind the small concrete building were only part of the fleet he operated today. Beckett found it difficult to believe a man like that had killed Holloway, but no one had returned for that portfolio. Adami was the only one who wouldn't find it necessary. All he had to do was have his driver

pull it right from the trash.

Face square, neck thick, hair beginning to thin, Adami lumbered out of his office as Beckett strode down the hall.

Beckett held up the portfolio.

Adami stopped short. "Where in the hell did you get that? It looks like the one Wheeler asked me to have my man check for at the Concert Hall. I told him to call Greevy. He said Greevy had searched, but was so dumb, he didn't trust him when he said it wasn't there."

Beckett grinned. No question about it. It was time he took a few days off.

"Any time you want to discuss dumb people," he said, "let me know. I head the list."

The restaurant lights were indirect, the carpet plush and deep, the mustachioed chef appearing periodically to be applauded by the diners.

Hands laced under her chin, a gowned Toni was listening to a tuxedoed Beckett.

"It was the original score of a waltz Tchaikovsky had written for the wedding of the daughter of a friend when he was young, and long before he became famous. It had been handed down through the family, brought to the United States in 1900, and was in the possession of Holloway's great-aunt

when she died. Since he was the only musician in the family, she willed it to him. Holloway saw no reason to struggle on a store clerk's salary if it was as valuable as he thought it was. Knowing Wheeler was a collector, he decided to ask him what it was worth. He called Wheeler from the music store, and since they were both going to the Concert Hall that evening, they agreed to meet in the locker room.

"At that point, Wheeler was simply being Mr. Nice Guy to a kid in the orchestra who said he needed advice about an inheritance. He thought it was money. When he saw what Holloway had, he offered him a hundred thousand, but Holloway wanted to see if someone else would offer more. He started to walk out. Wheeler grew fangs. He had to have that score. He knew Greevy and the stage managers hadn't seen either of them come in, so he decided to gamble. He picked up the bar from the table and hit Holloway."

"And lost because that one page had become wedged in the portfolio," said Toni. "Where is the score now?"

"In a sealed safety deposit box that can't be opened without a court order until the trial is over, when possession reverts to Mrs. Holloway, who can't wait to get rid of it because it caused her husband's death."

"I can't say I blame her. Incidentally, I called this afternoon. For the first time in living memory, no one knew where you were."

"Checking out my gear. I'm taking a week off to go fishing."

"No one could possibly believe that. What are you really up to?"

"I told you. I'm going fishing. If you care to come along—"

"Ah. *That's* it. The fishing trip is simply a cover story to get me alone far from civilization, but I'll call your bluff, Beckett. We'll borrow the Rolls from Crystal—"

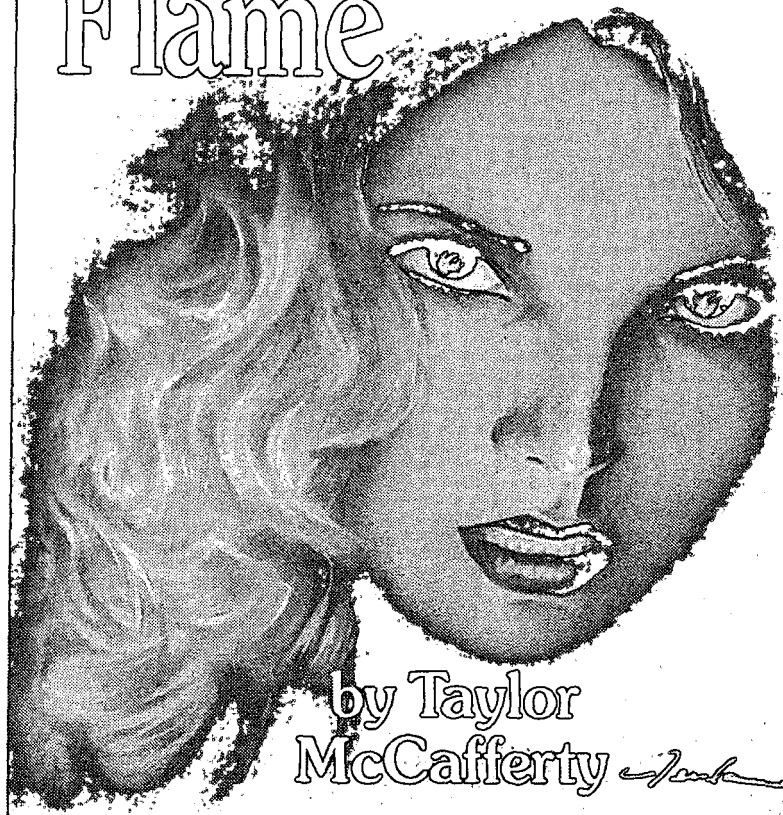
Beckett stared at her. "Rolls? There are two universal truths. Musicians don't kill each other, and no one borrows a Rolls to go fishing."

"Be realistic, Beckett. Is the purpose of this trip to go fishing or to chase each other through the woods for a week?"

Beckett grinned. "We borrow the Rolls."

FICTION

Old Flame



by Taylor
McCafferty *McCafferty*

After a funeral you're supposed to feel sad. And maybe a little scared, after coming face to face with the finality of death and all. I don't think, however, that you're supposed to feel angry, but that's

what I feel, all right. Real angry. With nobody left to be mad at any more. Except maybe Pa.

I'm sitting out here on the front porch, and I can hear him real plain in the kitchen, sniffing. Everybody that came by

to pay their respects has finally gone, and Pa's out there, rattling pots and pans, like maybe he's going to make us something to eat.

Now *that* would be a first. Pa, cooking. He's just making all that noise so I'll hear him and get up and fix something for us. In a minute he'll be yelling at me, "Ida Sue, ain't it about time for dinner?" How he can even think about eating is beyond me.

And all that pan rattling out there sure doesn't cover up his sniffing. I'm trying to keep calm, but that sniffing is a real irritating thing to have to listen to.

Because I know Pa's just crying for Jenelle. Not for anybody else. Not for me, not Chandler. Just Jenelle. I know Pa blames me for all this, too. I can see it in his eyes. And, of course, I can't forget what he screamed at me that day.

I know Pa won't ever admit the part he played in all this, either. After all, he did start it, didn't he? If he hadn't spoiled Jenelle so bad, giving her everything she ever wanted, maybe things would've been different. And if Pa hadn't ever told us how our mama really died, maybe none of this would've happened. Part of being able to do a thing is believing you can do it, isn't it?

And Papa helped me and Jenelle with the believing part. He helped us with that real good.

I was just thirteen the day Pa decided to break the news. Jenelle was fourteen; and if there was such a thing as a line between pretty and beautiful, Jenelle had crossed it that year. She made you want to gasp just looking at her.

I admit it, back then I couldn't help being jealous of her. Pa had been worshipping at her feet ever since she was a baby. And my mirror plainly told me she had me beat real bad in the looks department. Jenelle had long, wavy chestnut-colored hair, creamy-white skin, and big blue eyes with lashes so thick they looked false. At fourteen she had the kind of figure grown women envy.

I, on the other hand, had the kind of figure they call skinny, and the kind of hair they call dishwater blonde. It was real limp, too, like maybe some of that dishwater had been left in it.

It didn't help any, either, to know that your father plain and simple liked your sister best. Who was it that Pa put his arm around while he was telling us about Mama? Jenelle, of course. I was standing right next to him, too, but Pa reached over and pulled Jenelle close.

"Now, Jenelle, Ida Sue," he said, "it's high time you two finally knew about what happened to your mama. And I want to be the one to tell you before you hear it from somebody else."

To this day I'm still not sure why Pa told us. Neither Jenelle nor I even remembered our mama. She'd died when I was still a baby. And it wasn't like we still lived in Pigeon Fork where it all happened. We'd moved from there to Bullitt Lick right after Mama died. And nobody here even knew about it. Or if they'd heard about it long ago, they never connected the story to us.

Still, Jenelle was starting junior high the next week. Maybe Pa was afraid she would look it all up in the high school library. I'd heard tell that the new library the high school had just built had years of back issues of a dozen Kentucky newspapers. So maybe Pa was worried. Because even though Pigeon Fork was a hundred miles away, Mama had made news statewide.

I can still remember the way Pa's voice dropped to a whisper when he told us. Like he was talking about something sacred. Or maybe something too frightening to talk about out loud.

"Your mama was sitting out

on the back porch swing, holding her cat Muffin on her lap. I was in the kitchen, right on the other side of the screen door. So I could see her real plain out there, staring straight ahead, swinging back and forth. She was in a snit about something or another." Here Pa's eyes dropped for a second.

Even at thirteen I could guess what Mama might've been mad about. As far back as I could remember Pa had been something of a ladies' man; he was real goodlooking, dark and slim—and he must've dated every available woman around these parts. And he even dated some that weren't available. Both Jenelle and I had heard the gossip about Pa. In a town the size of Bullitt Lick, you couldn't keep something like that a secret. Jenelle and I exchanged a knowing look before Pa went on.

"She was just sitting, with that dang cat of hers. Then, all of a sudden, as sure as I'm sitting here, your mama just burned up."

Jenelle and I looked at him for a second without saying a word. Then I asked, my voice shaking a little, "What do you mean, burned up?"

"I mean, she just caught fire. That's all." Pa's eyes got this haunted look in them. "I—I tried to save her. I ran out

there, thinking I'd get her to roll on the ground, like you're supposed to do. But you couldn't get near her. She was all blue flame." Pa's voice trailed off. "Just blue flame is all."

Jenelle's eyes were even bigger than usual now. She swallowed once, and then asked, "Was she sitting by a stove?" Now, you've got to understand here that while Jenelle may have been heavy on looks, she was a quart low on smarts. Pa was used to it by now, though, because all he did was take a deep breath before he answered her.

"I said your ma was out on the porch, Jenelle. There aren't too many stoves out on a porch." Pa's voice was slow and patient. He rubbed his hand over his eyes like he was trying to rub the memory away. "That was what was so weird. The fire looked like it was coming from *inside* her."

Jenelle's eyes seemed to fill her whole face. Me, I was trying real hard not to smile. Because I was thinking, you mean to tell me that all these years we've been told that our mama died in a fire, and now you expect us to believe that Mama *was* the fire? Right.

"What happened to the cat?" My voice must've sounded a little skeptical, because Pa gave me a sharp glance.

"Now look, little girl," he said, "I'm trying to warn you. The same thing happened to that cat as happened to your mama, and I don't want it happening again. Ever." Pa looked away then, scowling. When he spoke again, his voice was real low, almost as if he were talking to himself. "You know, that porch swing she was sitting on wasn't even singed. Or the floor around them. But your mama—" Pa actually shuddered. He got up then, real abrupt. "Look, I don't ever want to talk about it again. I felt like you two should know. That's all."

Then he went on into the living room, and started reading the paper. Like what he'd just told us about wasn't anything more interesting than what happened at the church social last week.

After Pa went inside, Jenelle wrinkled her pretty nose and said, "Well, that was a disgusting thing for him to tell us. Yuk."

Seeing my big strong father actually shudder had done a lot to convince me that Pa was telling us the truth. "I think he was trying to warn us," I said.

"About what? I think he was being mean, telling us a creepy thing like that." Jenelle was pouting by then, so I gave up trying to talk to her.

In fact, we didn't talk about

it for a long time after that. I thought about it, though, wondering about poor Mama. Sometimes I even cried for her—for that woman I never got to know. But every time I'd start to bring it up with Jenelle, she'd cut me off with, "Look, that's disgusting, okay?" And she'd flounce out of the room.

The next year when I started junior high myself, I looked it all up in the library. Sure enough, Mama was written up in a lot of papers. All of them called it the same thing. Spontaneous human combustion. Like the way oily rags catch fire in a shed sometimes. Those newspapers said that there have been quite a few people over the years who've died like that. The papers said there's a lot in your body that could catch fire, like fats and oils, phosphorus, stuff like that.

After I read all those articles about Mama, it all seemed more real to me. More real, and more frightening. I started thinking about it a lot. Thinking about how they say your brain operates by making electrical connections. Like tiny sparks in your brain. I figured maybe what happened to Mama was like that. Maybe she got so upset that day that one of those brain sparks got out of control—and it caught her on fire.

I tried again to tell Jenelle

about it, too. "We'd better be careful," I said, "because you can never tell. Maybe we're like Mama, and if we get too upset, it could happen to us, too."

Jenelle looked real pale for a minute. Then she shrugged and tossed her dark curls. "Look, our mama made an ash of herself a long time ago." She smiled at her little joke. "It's got nothing to do with us."

I tried to make her listen, but she wouldn't hear of it. Eventually I realized Jenelle probably had nothing to worry about anyway. Because everything she wanted she seemed to get. Looking at her perfect face and perfect figure, I decided it was real likely that Jenelle might live her whole life and never once get upset.

It was me that had to be careful.

So I worked on getting to be real easygoing. About everything. When I'd forget to do one of my chores—and Jenelle would tell Pa—I learned to just keep cool. It got to where I could stand there and have Pa yell at me right in front of Jenelle, and I wouldn't feel a thing. Even when Jenelle made up stuff that I did, and she'd stand there, with that little half-smile on her face, all the time Pa was smacking me. Nothing was worth dying over, so I got laid back. After a while there wasn't

anything in the world that I cared about enough to get upset over.

Until I met Chandler Farris. Chandler had just transferred to our high school in my freshman year, and even though he was a year ahead of me, we were assigned to the same study hall.

I noticed him the first day he walked in. Chandler wasn't exactly the handsomest guy I'd ever seen, but he had the kind of face you don't get tired of looking at. Blue eyes, freckled nose, easy smile. A shock of sandy hair always falling in his eyes. I guess I was in love the minute I saw him, sitting across from me. When he asked me out, I thought I might actually faint from happiness.

When he asked me to go steady, I practically did faint. I guess those months I went steady with Chandler were the happiest I've ever known. Before or since. Suddenly, it didn't matter if the phone rang constantly for Jenelle, or if Pa practically ignored me, or anything else. I had Chandler, and that was all I needed.

I couldn't believe how lucky I was. One night driving home from the movies in Chandler's old Ford, he kept looking over at me and smiling. And looking over at me and smiling some more. Finally, I said, "What is it?"

That's when he told me. "You know what I really like about you?"

I shook my head no. It was the truth. I really had no idea.

"You're pretty and you don't know it."

I must've turned bright red. Chandler reached over and took my hand. For a minute we just grinned at each other.

"You're real smart, too." Now, I wasn't sure about that, either. Oh, I made good grades, all right. But if you never went out on dates—and before Chandler, I didn't—then you had a lot of time to study.

My grades didn't suffer any when I started dating Chandler, either. Because Chandler was a real serious student, too. He wanted to be a doctor, so he studied as much as I did. A lot of times we studied together. Jenelle used to laugh at us, calling us "the bookworms," like it was a dirty word. But that was before Chandler won that award in his junior year.

We'd been going together about a year when Chandler got selected something called a "President's Scholar." It's a big honor around here. It got Chandler's picture in the paper; it got him a full scholarship at any Kentucky college; and, let's face it, it got him Jenelle.

I'll never forget the expression on Jenelle's face while she

read about Chandler in the *Bullitt Lick Gazette*. It was like watching a cat read about a mouse. I remember feeling real uneasy, watching her face.

Pa was impressed with Chandler, too. He took that paper right out of Jenelle's hands and said, "This here boy's going to be rich one day. You mark my words. Rich." He beamed at me the whole time he was talking. It was probably the first time he'd ever said an approving thing to me.

Jenelle looked like she'd been slapped. She didn't look any better when Pa went on, "Jenelle, you'd do good to find yourself a catch like Ida Sue has. Somebody who's going to have some money. Instead of all those football idiots you're always mooning over." Jenelle had just started going steady with yet another football idiot that week; she turned without a word and stomped out of the room.

Up to then Jenelle had made it a point not to be around when "The Drip"—that's what she called Chandler—came around. But after that little scene with Pa, she was suddenly hanging all over Chandler the minute he walked in the door.

The first time she did it, I got as mad as I could let myself get. "He's mine, Jenelle," I told her as soon as Chandler left.

Jenelle gave me a look that said, "Oh, yeah?" Her mouth said, "All's fair in love and war." And she gave me one of those little half-smiles of hers as she walked away.

I watched her, feeling a little sick. And Chandler. Poor Chandler. He never knew what hit him. Even today it seems as if one day he was mine, and the next day I walked into the living room and saw them. Jenelle and Chandler, wrapped in each other's arms, so close together they seemed to be one.

I'd seen it coming by then, of course. I couldn't help but notice the new dazed look Chandler was wearing lately. Or how all of a sudden Jenelle seemed to need Chandler's help with every subject she had. I also noticed how Jenelle's hand lingered on his when she handed him her schoolbook, or got him a Coke. How she was always leaning real close to him so he could smell all that perfume she wore.

I could see it happening, all right, but I didn't know how to stop it. How could somebody like me fight somebody like Jenelle? Chandler and I had been sleeping together for almost six months by then, but even in bed with me, Chandler seemed a little distracted.

It must've taken Jenelle a little time to take Chandler away

from me, but it seemed like fifteen minutes. Max. After I walked in on them that night, I just stood there, not wanting to believe my eyes. For a second I couldn't breathe. My heart started pounding real funny, and my face got real hot. Jenelle and Chandler both started talking at once. Chandler was almost stammering. "Oh, Ida Sue, I am so sorry. Jenelle and I—we—"

I didn't wait around to hear the rest. I just turned and ran upstairs as fast as I could. There I took a long, long shower, standing under the cool water and crying and crying. Until finally I was all cried out. Finally, I'd washed that awful scene right out of my mind.

I never broke down again. After that, when Chandler started coming by to pick up Jenelle, I made sure I was out of sight. I still watched him, though, from behind the curtains in my room. Watched him going off with Jenelle, smiling into her eyes. I wanted to hate him, but I just couldn't. Hating Jenelle, however, was real easy.

When Chandler went away to Centreville College that next year, I didn't know which hurt the most—seeing him with Jenelle or not seeing him at all.

Before he left, Chandler and Jenelle got engaged. Jenelle showed me that diamond ring

just like I'd never dated Chandler myself. Like he'd always been hers. It was as if she'd put the whole thing out of her mind. "I think Chandler and I were meant for each other," Jenelle told me. She actually told me that.

After Chandler left for college, Jenelle moped around the house for about two weeks. Pa started complaining weakly about her running up a phone bill calling Chandler long distance.

Then, of course, Jenelle couldn't sit at home. She started dating other guys.

"Jenelle, what are you doing? What about Chandler?" I asked her the first time she went flouncing out of the house with some guy she'd met at the restaurant where she'd started working.

Jenelle looked at me as cool as you please. "What about him?" she said.

I couldn't think of a thing to say back to her. I just stared at her, open-mouthed.

She shrugged, and smiled that little half-smile of hers. "Now don't get all uppity with me, Ida Sue. I still love Chandler just like always. He's going to give me everything I've ever wanted. But *he* wouldn't want me sitting around this house getting bored. There's no harm in me having a little fun."

I had to clench my hands together to keep from slapping her. I thought about telling Chandler, too. But I knew he wouldn't believe me, or else he'd hate me for trying to stir up trouble. So I kept still. And waited.

That was during my senior year in high school. To keep my cool, I buried myself in my studies. I ended up with straight A's and a full scholarship. To any college I wanted. That fall I decided to go to Centreville College, just like Chandler.

I guess in the back of my mind I knew what I was up to. That what finally happened I'd planned all along. But I told myself that I was going to Centreville just to be near Chandler, that was all. I realized he belonged to Jenelle now, but I just wanted to see him again. Nothing more. Just to see him.

I think I believed that. I know it never occurred to Jenelle I could be going to Centreville because of Chandler. For one thing, Jenelle could never think of me as competition. I'd filled out some, and I'd learned to wear makeup right; but Jenelle had me beat so long ago, I don't think she even saw me any more.

As a matter of fact, the day before I left, Jenelle actually gave me a hug and said, "Now

you keep an eye on my man. Make sure he doesn't get away from me." Then she laughed like the idea was preposterous. This, even though she herself was dating other people.

I ended up in two of Chandler's classes, and it seemed as natural a thing in the world that Chandler and I would end up studying together. And even more natural that one night Chandler would lean over and kiss me just like he used to almost three years before.

He pulled back right away, and then just stared at me. "You know what's happened, don't you?" His eyes were so blue. "I've fallen in love with you all over again. I can see now it's you and me. It always has been."

My heart was pounding so hard I could hardly say what had to be said. "But, Chandler, what about Jenelle?"

His face reddened, and he said, "I realize now that was just an infatuation." He looked away and added, his voice real low, "I been hearing things about Jenelle for a long time now. You know how folks in Bullitt Lick love to spread bad news."

So he'd heard about Jenelle's running around, after all. I hadn't had to say a word. "I guess maybe I'm old fashioned," Chandler went on, "but

I need a wife who'll be faithful." He reached over and took my hand. "I need you, Ida Sue. You and I—well, we've got so much in common. We belong together."

He ran his hands through his hair and added, "It's going to be hard telling Jenelle. But it's got to be done."

I started feeling real hot, just thinking about it, wondering how Jenelle would take it. But Chandler said, "Don't worry. She'll understand. You'll see. She'll realize you and I were meant for each other."

Jenelle was waiting for Chandler on the front porch when we went home for Christmas that year. When she lifted her hand to wave at him, I could see that diamond on her finger sparkling in the cold winter sun.

Jenelle's smile faded as soon as she saw me get out of the car, too. "Why, Ida Sue, I didn't know you were driving back with Chandler. I thought you might take the bus—" Her voice trailed off when she got a good look at our faces. I guess what we had to tell her was written all over them because Jenelle's face went chalky white. "What is going on?" Her voice went so loud and shrill that it brought Pa to the front door in back of her.

Chandler plunged right in,

though. "I'm real sorry, Jenelle, but I've found out I love Ida Sue here. I always have." He went on, saying how he wouldn't hurt her for the world, but it was surely a lot kinder just to tell her outright than to lead her on.

I was watching Jenelle's face while Chandler talked. As pale as it was before, it went slowly deep, deep red.

"I know you'll wish us well," Chandler finished. I'll never forget what he looked like at that moment. So sweet, so earnest, so sure that this was the best way to handle everything.

Jenelle looked like she might faint. She swayed on her feet, and Chandler rushed forward to catch her. Jenelle started to speak, and for a second not a sound came out of her mouth. Then it was like a wail, the wail of an animal, wounded and hurting. "No-o-o-o." That was all she said. But she flung herself at Chandler, wrapped herself around him, as if she never meant to let go.

I knew right then what was happening. I'd seen her eyes, like something was smoldering in them. "Chandler!" I yelled. "Get away from her!"

Chandler turned to me, his face registering surprise; and it seemed suddenly as if everything was happening in slow motion. Chandler made a move

as if to pull away, but it was already too late. He opened his mouth to scream, and then they were both engulfed by a blue flame. A blue flame that burned and burned and burned—but didn't seem to ignite anything else. Nothing else but my sister and the man I loved.

I stood there, watching those awful flames, and it felt like a part of me was dying, too. Even from where I stood, a good three feet away, the heat was so intense I had to step back. I realized dimly that Pa had rushed outside, screaming Jenelle's name. Over and over he screamed it until it was just a whimper.

Then Pa turned to me. I can't forget what he said. "WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?" I keep hearing Pa say that. Over and over.

It's hard to believe, sitting out here, that this is where Jenelle and Chandler both died. Out here on this very porch. The floorboards aren't even singed.

Pa is still whimpering out in the kitchen. Still sniffing. I heard Pa telling everybody at

the funeral and all those reporters that showed up that what happened was a terrible accident. That Jenelle didn't mean to do what she did. And that she sure didn't mean to take Chandler with her. I know that's a lie.

If Pa had seen what I saw that day, he'd know it, too. In the midst of the flames, for just a moment I could still see Jenelle's face. She was looking straight at me. And smiling that little half-smile. Until the flames rose so high, so hot, you couldn't see anything. Only her and Chandler's shapes, looking as if they were whirling in the blaze. Jenelle took Chandler from me on purpose. The only way she could, any more.

It makes me so mad to think about it. But there's no one left to be mad at any more. Nobody left to vent this awful anger on. I'm sitting out here, trying to cool down, trying to put it all into perspective. But the whole thing makes me so horribly mad. And Pa's sniffing out there keeps making me madder. And madder. I feel like I could just explode.

MYSTERY CLASSIC

The Greuze Girl

by Freeman Wills Crofts

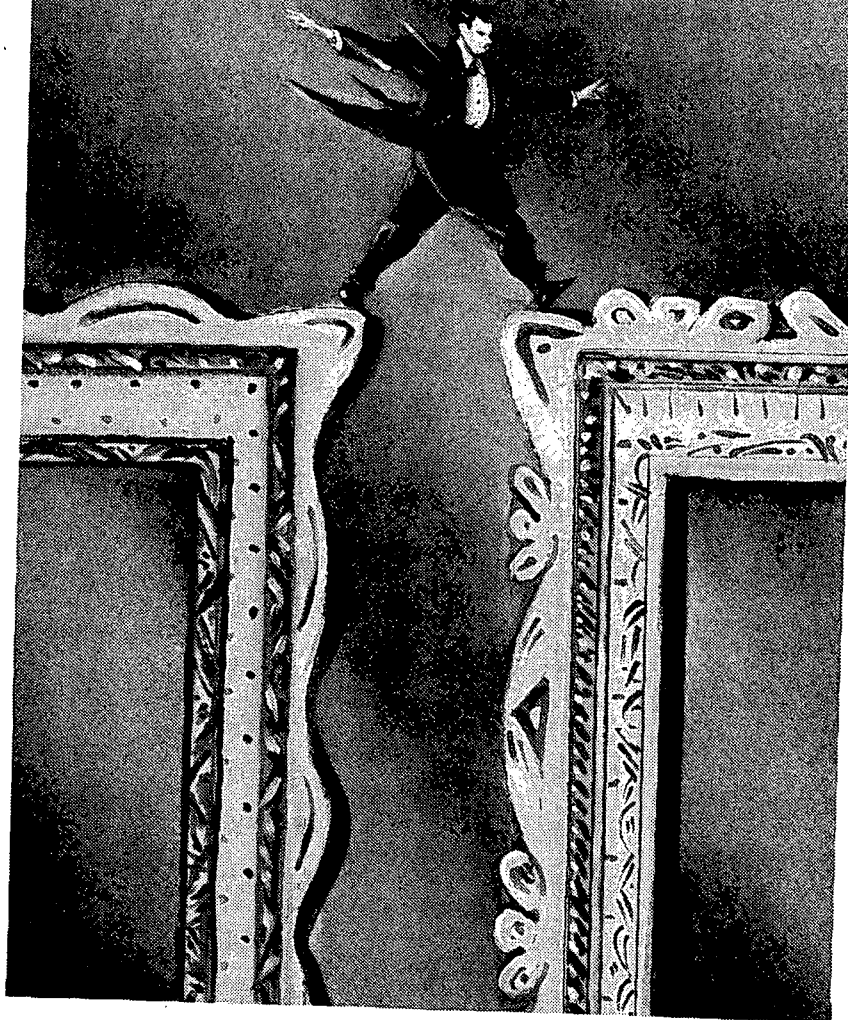


Illustration by Karen Stolper

129

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mr. Nicholas Lumley, commission agent, laid his fountain pen on his desk, straightened himself up with a sigh of relief, and glanced at his watch. To his satisfaction, it told him that the close of what had been a hard day's work had been reached, and that in a few moments he must leave his office if he wished to catch his usual train home.

But Fate ruled otherwise. As he rose from his desk an office boy entered and laid a card before him. It appeared that Mr. Silas S. Snaith, of 105, Hall's Building, Broadway, New York, wished to see him.

"Show him in," said Mr. Lumley, stifling a sigh of disappointment.

Mr. Snaith proved to be a tall, slim man of some five-and-thirty, with clearcut eyes, which danced over Mr. Lumley and about the room as if to leave no detail of either unnoticed. He was well dressed in dark clothes of American cut, but an ornate watchchain, ruby tiepin, and diamond sleeve-links seemed to point to a larger endowment of money than of taste. In his hand he carried a leather dispatch case of unusually large dimensions, which he placed carefully on the floor beside the chair to which Mr. Lumley pointed.

"Mr. Nicholas Lumley?" he began, speaking with a drawl and slight American accent. "Pleased to meet you, sir."

He held out his hand, which Mr. Lumley shook, murmuring his acknowledgments.

The other seated himself.

"You take on jobs for other people, I reckon," he said, "odd jobs—for a consideration?"

Mr. Lumley admitted the impeachment.

"Why, then, I'd like if you would take on one for me. It's a short job, and easy in a way, and if you can put it through there'll be quite a little commission."

"What is the job, Mr. Snaith?"

"It'll take a minute or two to tell you. But first you'll understand it's confidential."

"Certainly. Most of my work is that."

There was a hint of coldness in Mr. Lumley's voice which the other sensed.

"That's all right. No need to get rattled. Have a cigar?"

He pulled two from his waistcoat pocket, holding one out. Mr. Lumley accepted, and both men lit up.

"It's this way," went on Snaith. "I'm in lumber, and I've not done too badly—house on Fifth Avenue and all that. I've more spare

time than I had, and you mightn't believe it, but the hobby I'm fondest of is pictures. I've toured Europe for the galleries alone, and a mighty fine time I had. And my own collection runs to quite a few dollars.

"A year last fall I struck a picture that fairly licked anything I'd seen before—at Poitiers, in France—and when I left that town the picture came too. It cost me a cool fifteen thousand dollars, but it was worth it. It was a Greuze, a small thing, not more than ten inches by a foot—just a girl's head—but a fair wonder. The man I bought it from told me it was one of a pair, and since that I've been looking out for the other one. And now, by the Lord, I've found it!"

Mr. Snaith paused and drew on his cigar, which he held pipewise in the corner of his mouth.

"I went up to see your Lord Arthur Wentworth this trip—Wentworth Hall, Durham. My word, that's some place! I had business with him about some acres of trees; he holds land in N'York State. Well, he had to go to some other room to get a map of his do-mains, and I had a look around the study to pass the time till he came back—idle curiosity, as you might say. Well, I'll be beat to a frazzle if there, on the wall behind where I'd been sitting, wasn't hanging the companion picture; I'd seen photographs of it, so I knew. I reckoned it might be only a copy, so I nipped up and had a thorough good squint at it before his lordship came back. I thought it was the genu-ine thing, but I just wasn't plumb sure.

"I had time to take a couple of snaps of it with my pocket Kodak before his lordship came back. Then we got the lumber deal through. For all he's a member of the effete British aristocracy, and about as ro-bust as a wisp of hay at that, he's all awake is Lord Arthur. A hard nut, as maybe you'll find.

"I said nothing about the picture, but all the time I was figuring how to get wise to its genu-ineness. When I got back to London I went to the best man I knew in the trade—Frank L. Mitchell, of Pall Mall. What Frank L. Mitchell doesn't know about pictures wouldn't be worth hearing. I had him promise to go down and see the picture for me.

"He went the next day. He waited till he saw his lordship and friends start out on a gunning stunt, then he went to the house and, with lubricating the butler's palm, got a look round inside. He saw the picture, and he's satisfied it's the real article. But he went one better than that. The holders of all these genu-ine pictures are known, and when he got back he looked up the records, and

found that when the present lord's father purchased it fifty years ago it was recognized to be the real thing, and paid for as such.

"So that's bedrock. It's likely the present owner knows that, but of course, it's not certain. Mitchell figures that bit of canvas is worth three thousand of your pounds—fifteen thousand dollars. Now, Mr. Lumley, I want that picture, and I want you to get it for me."

The American sat back and looked expectantly at Mr. Lumley. The latter's interest, which had been aroused by his visitor's story, suddenly waned.

"That's easier said than done, I'm afraid," he answered slowly. "Ten to one his lordship won't sell."

"I reckon he'll sell—on my terms. Note the connection." Mr. Snaith demonstrated on his fingers. "Here you have a lord that's hard up—I got wise to that. It takes him all he can do to keep his end up. Three thousand may not be much, but it's a darned sight more than he can afford to drop for nothing. You say he'll not sell. I'll agree, and ask, Why not? Why, because he's a proud man. He's not going to have that space on his study wall to remind him and his friends and his servants what he's done. But that's where I come in."

Mr. Snaith picked up his dispatch case and, opening it carefully, drew out a tissue-covered object and laid it on Mr. Lumley's desk. With thin, nervous fingers he unwrapped the paper, revealing to the commission agent's astonished gaze a small oil painting in a heavy and elaborate gilt frame.

It was a charming study of a girl's head; light, elegant, dainty work. She was beautiful; blue-eyed, creamy-complexioned, and with masses of red-gold hair. But it was not her beauty that held the observer. It was the soul which shone behind the face. She was looking up eagerly into the distance, with a half smile on her lips, as if at a vision of heaven or of love. Mr. Lumley gazed in admiration.

"Warm stuff," murmured Snaith appreciatively, "and that's only a copy. The picture's celebrated the world over, and there's scores of copies. It's so good, is this one"—he shot a sidelong glance at Mr. Lumley—"I can hardly tell it isn't genu-ine, and I doubt if you or Lord Wentworth could either."

Mr. Lumley felt slightly uncomfortable, though he could not say exactly why. But something faintly unpleasant in his visitor's manner grated on his rather sensitive nerves.

"Now, my proposition is this," the American went on. "You see

his lordship and show him this picture. Tell him straight it's a copy, but so good a copy that only a few men in the world could tell the difference. That he'll be able to see for himself. Tell him your client offers him two thousand pounds down to let you change the pictures."

"Why not deal with him yourself?"

"Two reasons. First, he don't love me any over that lumber deal. He was polite and all that, but I could sense he was glad to see my back. Second, I have business in Paris tomorrow, and I'll only have time to call here passing through London on my way to the States next Friday."

Mr. Lumley did not reply, and Snaith continued, speaking earnestly:

"He'll do it, for he wants the money. Note how it would seem to him. No one will know anything about it, and the new picture will look the same as the other, and if the question ever does come up, it will be supposed a mistake was made fifty years ago when his father bought it. His pride will be saved. And if two thousand doesn't raise him, why you can offer him three. I just must have the thing, and I don't mind a hundred or two one way or another. Your own fee, if you put it through, to be what you name—say two hundred pounds and expenses—that is, if you think that's enough."

"Enough?" cried Mr. Lumley. "More than enough."

"That's all right. Then I reckon you'll take it on? Now about *bona fides*. I've inquired about you before I came here, and what I've heard has satisfied me. But you know nothing of me, so you'll likely want some money instead of an introduction. As a guarantee of good faith I'll hand you notes for two thousand pounds. If the deal comes to more you can pay it. You'll have the picture as security, and you can hold it till I pay you the balance. That all right?"

Mr. Lumley thought rapidly. The business appeared simple and straightforward and, so far as he could see, square. At all events his part of it was square. He would be perfectly open with Lord Arthur, and he would honestly try to effect the sale. He could but fail.

"That seems very fair, Mr. Snaith. I'll do what I can."

"Good. Then count those."

The visitor took a roll of notes from his pocket and, dividing them, handed a bundle to his new agent. There were twenty of them, Bank of England notes, each value one hundred pounds.

"Correct," said Mr. Lumley as he scribbled a receipt.

"There are two other things," Snaith went on. "First, I don't want

my name mentioned to Lord Wentworth. As I say, we got across each other over that lumber deal, and there's no kind of sense in putting his back up at the start. Just say a rich American wants it. And next, note my movements for the next three days. I cross tonight to Paris, and the Hotel Angleterre will find me till Friday morning. I cross Friday, call here at six P.M. for the picture, and leave Euston by the American boat train at seven. Got that?"

"I follow you," answered Mr. Lumley. "That gives me two days. I'll keep your case to carry the picture."

When the American left Mr. Lumley remained seated at his desk, his mind busy with the somewhat unusual commission with which he had been entrusted. But there was a peculiar feature in this case. That idea of substituting the copy was new to his experience. But it was certainly ingenious, and if Lord Arthur were really hard up, it was conceivable that it might tempt him to agree to the proposal. But apart from this novel feature, the matter seemed reasonable and above board enough. And yet Mr. Lumley was not satisfied. He was, or believed himself to be, a judge of character, and all his instincts had bade him beware of this Snaith. He felt that it behoved him to be on his guard, and stories he had read of confidence tricks recurred vaguely to his memory.

But he had undertaken the task, and it now no longer mattered whether he had been wise or foolish; he must get on with it. He saw that he had no time to lose, and eleven o'clock that night, therefore, found him moving out of King's Cross en route for the north. But like the king of old, his thoughts troubled him and he could not sleep. Whether it was due to the rather heavy supper he had eaten—Mr. Lumley was slightly dyspeptic—he did not know, but a feeling of depression and foreboding weighed on his spirits.

Suddenly an idea shot into his mind. Those notes—Snaith had parted with them so easily—*were they forgeries?* Feverishly he took them from his pocket and examined them. No, they seemed all right. But, he determined, he would make sure. His first business in the morning would be to call at a bank in Durham and have them tested.

And then a possible meaning of Snaith's actions flashed before him—a real thing before which his half nightmarish imaginings vanished as if they had never been. As the idea sank into his horrified brain, Nicholas Lumley began to know temptation.

He had believed that the American's offer was a two hundred pound commission on the completion of a sale. But he saw now that he had been mistaken. No sale had been contemplated. The

thing was hideously clear. He had been offered, not two hundred pounds, but twenty-two hundred—thirty-two hundred—any sum almost that he liked to name—to *steal the picture!*

And, merciful heavens, how easy it would be! He had only to devise some scheme to get to the study with his case, and arrange something—a telephone call, for example—to get his lordship out of the room. Twenty seconds would do the whole thing. He could change the pictures, complete his business, leave without haste, and—three thousand two hundred pounds! Perhaps four thousand!

Four thousand pounds! Four thousand pounds skillfully invested meant anything up to two hundred fifty pounds a year. Mr. Lumley was not a rich man, and an additional two hundred fifty pounds would just make the difference between continuous, wearing economy and ease.

Mr. Lumley groaned as he wiped the cold sweat off his forehead.

And Snaith would say nothing. He would perhaps smile knowingly, but he would pay and take his picture and go.

He wrestled with it all night, and next morning his face was white and grim and set as he sallied forth from the hotel in which he had breakfasted in search of a bank. Here one of his fears was disposed of. The notes were genuine.

An hour later he stepped out of a taxi at the door of Wentworth Hall. On requesting an interview with his lordship, he was shown into a small sitting room and asked to wait. After some minutes he was here joined by Lord Arthur, an elderly man, thin and a little stooped, whose face was lined as if from care and suffering.

He looked like a man with an incurable disease, to whom life is a continuous burden. But there was no trace of bitterness about him, and his manner as he waved Mr. Lumley to a chair was not only courteous in the extreme, but even kindly.

"I am a commission agent, as you may have seen from my card, Lord Arthur," began Mr. Lumley, "and I have called on behalf of a wealthy American client, to lay before you a proposal which I sincerely trust you will not consider objectionable. May I say, as explaining my own position, that I have been offered a handsome commission—no less than two hundred pounds—if my client's wishes can be met? You will understand, therefore"—Mr. Lumley smiled slightly—"how much I hope you will see your way at least to give the proposal your full consideration."

Lord Arthur seemed pleased by his visitor's candor.

"I will certainly do that," he replied pleasantly. "What does your client want?"

For answer Mr. Lumley opened the dispatch case and took from it Mr. Snaith's picture.

"Good gracious!" cried Lord Arthur when the tissue paper had been unrolled. "My Greuze! How did you get that?" He looked sharply and with some suspicion at his visitor.

Mr. Lumley hastened to assuage his fears.

"It is not yours, Lord Arthur. It is only a copy. But I wish you would tell me what you think of it."

The old gentleman bent over the frame.

"If I had not your assurance, I should swear it was mine," he said at last. "Why, the very frame is identical. Bring it into the study and let us compare."

Mr. Lumley, having folded back the paper and replaced the frame in its case, followed the owner of the house to a large, well-furnished, airy room giving on the terrace before the entrance. Lord Arthur closed the door and directed his visitor's attention to the wall above the fireplace.

Though he knew what to expect, the latter could scarcely refrain from a start of astonishment, for there, to all intents and purposes, hung the veritable picture which had been given to him by Snaith.

"Put yours beside it," Lord Arthur directed.

Mr. Lumley obeyed, and held his picture on the wall next the other. Both men gazed in silence. The two seemed absolutely identical; the most minute examination even of the very frames failed to discover any difference between them.

"I shouldn't have believed it," Lord Arthur said after a prolonged scrutiny; and then indicating a deep armchair before the fire, "but sit down, won't you, and tell me all about it."

Mr. Lumley slipped his copy back in the case and sat down.

"My client," he explained, "is an enthusiastic collector. He has recently purchased the companion to this, and he is keenly anxious to get the original of this one also. He wondered whether by any chance you could be induced so far to oblige him as to accept his copy, together with whatever sum you care to name—he suggested two thousand pounds—but whatever you thought fair, in exchange for the original."

Lord Arthur stared.

"Upon my word," he exclaimed, "this is a very extraordinary business." He sat in thought for a few moments; then, with a little sidelong glance, asked:

"Suppose I said three thousand?"

"If you think that a fair figure, I am authorized to pay it."

His lordship made a gesture of surprise.

"Extraordinary!" he repeated. "And how does your client know that my picture is the original?"

"That, unfortunately, I cannot explain to your lordship, as I am not in his confidence. But I may say that he seemed perfectly satisfied on that point."

"It's more than I am. I may tell you that I have always regarded that picture—my own, I mean—as a copy. And I don't think, even if it were the original, that it would be worth anything like what you say. My knowledge of pictures, I admit, is but slight, still I should say that a thousand would be its outside price."

"Then, Lord Arthur," interjected Mr. Lumley with a smile, "would you allow me to change it for a thousand pounds?"

"I didn't say that. What I meant was that I should like an explanation of what seems to me a very peculiar proposal, to put it mildly. A man comes to me and offers me for a copy of a picture at least twice the outside value of the original. It sounds queer on the face of it, doesn't it?"

"But, Lord Arthur, you must remember that in such a case the intrinsic value of the picture may not represent its reasonable price. It may have an additional sentimental value. It may be an heirloom. You might not care to hang anything but an original on your walls. These are considerations which my client took into account. That they have a cash value would be recognized in any court of law."

"Quite true," Lord Arthur admitted. "And," he went on dryly, "bearing these points in mind, suppose I accept your two thousand pounds for my copy, would you be satisfied?"

"More than satisfied. I should be grateful."

"You said you had the money there?"

For answer Mr. Lumley laid the twenty hundred pound notes on the table. Lord Arthur took them up.

"You will excuse me, I'm sure, but the matter is so very extraordinary that I think I am entitled to ask, How do I know that these are genuine, and, if genuine, are not stolen?"

"Perfectly entitled, Lord Arthur. I would suggest that you send a man with them to your bank, and let the matter stand over until you receive his report."

Lord Arthur did not reply, but, moving over to his table, he wrote for a few seconds.

"Sign that, and you may take the picture," he said.

The document read:

Received from Lord Arthur Wentworth, Wentworth Hall, the copy of Greuze's *Une Jeune Fille* which up to now has hung on his study wall, in return for the copy of the same picture supplied him by the undersigned on this date, and in consideration of the sum of two thousand pounds (£2,000), which has been paid in Bank of England £100 notes, numbered A61753E to A61772E."

"I don't want to take your client's money on false pretenses," Lord Arthur went on, "so if within a month he has satisfied himself that he has bought a copy, I will refund him his two thousand pounds and his picture on his returning my own. If he likes to pay this money for the exchange, I do not see why I should not accept it. But you must warn him from me that I think he is in error, and the responsibility must be his alone. At all events, may I say I think you have fairly earned your commission."

Mr. Lumley, having expressed his gratitude and satisfaction, signed the receipt for the picture, obtained another for the money, exchanged the pictures, packed his purchase in the case, and, greatly rejoicing, took his leave. He felt he had successfully carried out his commission while preserving his honor, and on both counts he was pleased.

As he sat smoking in the afternoon express to King's Cross, he wondered idly which of them—Snaith or Lord Arthur—held the correct view about the picture. In any case, it did not matter very much to him, Lumley. He had done what he was asked, he would give Snaith a true account of what had happened, claim his commission, and, so far as he was concerned, the incident would be closed.

And then occurred one of those singular coincidences which are supposed to take place only in books, but which, as a matter of fact, happen more frequently in real life. It chanced that at Grantham, Dobbs, the R.A., got into the compartment which up till then Mr. Lumley had occupied in solitary state. Now, Lumley had played golf with Dobbs, and the two were on friendly terms.

They conversed on general topics for some minutes, and then it occurred to Mr. Lumley that it would be interesting to get Dobbs's opinion of the Greuze. He therefore opened his case and produced the picture.

"What do you think of that?" he asked, as he handed it over.

"Too dark to say," returned the other, "but it looks like a jolly fine copy."

"A copy?"

"A copy, yes. It's a well-known picture. Unless," the R.A. smiled, "unless you are just back from a burglarious expedition to Paris, the original is still in the Louvre."

Mr. Lumley gasped.

"I suppose, Dobbs," he said earnestly, "you're sure about that?"

"Of course I'm sure. Everyone knows that who knows anything at all of pictures. Why, I remember the exact place on the wall where it hung. I've looked at it scores of times. You didn't by any chance think it was an original?"

"I know nothing about it, but I bought it for a man who thought so."

"H'm. How much, if it's a fair question?"

"Two thousand."

The R.A. stared.

"Good Lord, man!" he cried, "you're not serious? The original of that picture is worth, perhaps, twelve hundred. This"—he tapped the painting on his knee—"is worth, well, say forty pounds at the outside limit."

Mr. Lumley felt the bottom dropping out of his world.

"I don't understand the thing any more than you do," he answered slowly. "I was commissioned to buy this particular picture. I was told I might give two thousand or three, or practically anything that was asked, but I was to get the thing."

"I suppose it was a confidential deal?"

"Well, yes, I'm afraid so, but it would not be a breach of confidence to say it was for an American of the *nouveau riche* type."

Dobbs tossed his head contemptuously.

"That explains it," he said with a short laugh. And then the talk drifted into other channels.

But though Mr. Lumley felt no responsibility for a mistake, had such been made, there still remained in his mind an uneasy feeling about the whole affair. And later on that same evening he made a discovery which perturbed him still further.

He was wrestling with the problem of how Snaith, a man who had visited most of the galleries of Europe, could have failed to know that the original was in the Louvre. And then he recollected that this puzzle was not confined to the American. Snaith had not trusted his own judgment. He had consulted the best authority on pictures of whom he knew in London—Mitchell, of Pall Mall. Mitchell's name was unfamiliar to Mr. Lumley, but at all events he must be an authority, and—Mitchell had not known either.

He wondered what kind of standing Mitchell possessed, and, after reaching his office and locking up the dispatch case in his safe, he took up his directory to see if he could gain any light on the point. And he did, but not the kind of light he expected. There was no one in Pall Mall of that name!

Mr. Lumley whistled. From experiencing a slight dissatisfaction he was now thoroughly uneasy. It certainly looked as if something were wrong.

He locked his office and, with a feeling of gratified surprise at the manner in which he was rising to an unexpected emergency, he drove to one of the large hotels on the Embankment much frequented by wealthy Americans. Here he was able to borrow a directory of New York. He looked up Snaith. There was no Silas S. Snaith mentioned either on Fifth Avenue or anywhere else. He looked up Hall's Building on Broadway. The name did not appear.

"Hoaxed!" Mr. Lumley whispered to himself as he wiped the perspiration off his forehead. "The whole thing's a plant. There is no Snaith. There is no Mitchell. That man's story was a yarn. But what in the name of goodness is the game?"

He sat on in the hotel reading-room buried in thought. And gradually little things, noted subconsciously at the time and forgotten, returned to his memory and became definite mental pictures. Though he had hardly realized it during the interview, Snaith had puzzled him—not Snaith's story, but Snaith himself, his personality. His language, his bearing, all, Mr. Lumley now saw, had been inconsistent. At one time he had been ultra-American; he had, for example, talked the American of the dime novel or the screen message, while at another his English had been as good as Mr. Lumley's own. The more the commission agent thought over it the more suspicious he became that Snaith was concealing his identity—that he was not, in fact, an American at all.

As he turned the matter over in his mind a possible solution suddenly struck him. Could it be that Snaith meditated an attempt to steal the original from the Louvre? He had certainly spoken of a visit to Paris. Could his plan be to destroy Lord Arthur's picture, and to swear that the treasure he had stolen had been purchased from his lordship? If so, he would be able to support his story by incontrovertible evidence of the sale. Yes, Mr. Lumley concluded, this theory certainly represented a possibility.

And if so, there was the equal possibility that he, Lumley, was assisting in a crime. How could he test the matter? How satisfy himself?

He decided to go down to Scotland Yard, tell his story, and do what he was there advised. Responsibility for the sequel would then be off his shoulders.

He glanced at his watch. It was just ten o'clock. Leaving the hotel, he drove along the Embankment to the Yard.

"I want to see the inspector on duty," he demanded.

He was shown into a small office, and there a tall, quiet-mannered, efficient-looking man asked him his business.

"I have had, Mr. Inspector, a somewhat unusual experience," began Mr. Lumley. "I don't in the least know that anything is wrong, but the circumstances are suspicious, and I felt I ought to let your people know, so that you could form your own opinion."

"Very right, sir. Perhaps you will tell me the facts."

Mr. Lumley began to recount his adventures. The inspector listened courteously but impassively till Lord Arthur's name was mentioned. Then a sudden gleam of interest came into his eyes, and he gave his visitor his undivided attention. But he did not interrupt, allowing Mr. Lumley to finish the story in his own way.

"You have made a very clear statement, sir," he said when the other ceased speaking, "and I should like to congratulate you on your wisdom in reporting to us. I think it probable that you'll find yourself justified. Excuse me a moment."

He left the room, returning in a few minutes with another official, who carried a large file of papers.

"This is Inspector Niblock," he said, "and though I couldn't tell until I had heard it, I fancy he will be even more interested in your statement than I was. Would it be too much to ask you to repeat it to him?"

For the second time Mr. Lumley related his experiences. While the first inspector had shown interest in the story, Niblock scarcely covered up actual excitement with the cloak of professional calm. He repeated his colleague's congratulations and then turned to the file of papers. From it he drew a number of photographs and handed them to Lumley.

"Have a look over those, sir, will you?" he invited.

Mr. Lumley took the cards. They were portraits of a number of quite ordinary-looking men and women. Mildly surprised, he turned them over. And then his surprise became astonishment, for there, on the fourth card, was a full length view of Mr. Silas S. Snaith.

"Seen him before?" asked Niblock, chuckling and rubbing his hands. "I think you've done a better stroke of business than you

know, Mr. Lumley." He became serious in a moment and continued: "And now let us lay our plans, for there must be no bungling in this affair."

The two inspectors spoke in undertones for a few moments. Then Niblock turned.

"You say the picture is now in your safe, Mr. Lumley? I presume it is in precisely the same state as when you took it down from Lord Arthur's study wall?"

"Precisely."

"We must get hold of it at once. Will you come to your office now and let us have it? You can keep the taxi and drive on home."

The three men left the great building and, hailing a vehicle, were driven to Mr. Lumley's place of business. The latter led his companions to his private room, where after pulling down the blinds, he produced the dispatch case. In a moment the detectives were examining the picture.

"We'll borrow it as well as this case," said Niblock as he carefully repacked it. "You may expect us back with it at about five tomorrow. Where does that door lead to?"

"A filing room."

"The very thing. You can, perhaps, let us withdraw into that room, so that if your interview with Snaith does not go satisfactorily we shall be able to give you assistance. That's all tonight, I think."

Mr. Lumley begged for further information, but Niblock refused it on the ground that the agent's display of ignorance would be more convincing to Snaith if it were genuine.

"If," the inspector added, "by some chance he should come before his time, you will tell him that the picture has been left at your bank for safekeeping, but that it will be in your hands before six. If we find him here on our arrival we shall assume the role of bank officials. But in that case we shall have to wait in the passage outside your office."

Next evening Mr. Lumley was once more seated in his private room, when, shortly after five, the two inspectors entered, accompanied by a sergeant in uniform.

"There is the picture," said Niblock after brief greetings had been exchanged, "untouched, except that we have had to put in a new frame. By an unfortunate accident I dropped it, with the result that the corner of the frame was split and the gilding damaged. You will see here what has happened."

The inspector undid a brown paper parcel and brought to light

the old frame, split, as he had said, at one corner.

"Should Mr. Snaith observe that the frame has been changed," he continued, "you will describe the accident, though saying it happened with yourself. You will express regret for your carelessness, and you will say that you kept the old frame for his inspection. You can leave the rest to us. Now let us into your filing room, for you must be alone when your visitor comes."

The three police officers stepped into the small back chamber, and the door was almost, but not completely closed. Mr. Lumley, nervous and considerably perturbed, sat writing at his desk. He did not know what form the coming interview was to take, and he was considerably annoyed that the officers had not taken him more fully into their confidence. He felt that if he only knew what to expect he would be in a better position to meet it.

The minutes passed slowly—so slowly that more than once Mr. Lumley put his watch to his ear to make sure that it was still ticking. But at last six o'clock came, and a few minutes later Mr. Snaith was announced.

"Say, but your railroads want hustling some," was his greeting as he stepped breezily into the room. "I've just got in from Paris, only forty minutes late." He sat down and opened his heavy coat, then went on with more than a trace of anxiety in his tone: "And how has the deal gone? Got it through?"

"Got it through, Mr. Snaith, I am glad to say, and with very little trouble. But one thing is rather upsetting. Lord Arthur says the picture isn't genuine—it's only a copy."

Snaith looked up sharply.

"But you have it all right—here?" he asked, and, in spite of an obvious effort, there was eagerness in his voice.

"Yes; it's in my safe. But when he said it was a copy, I was doubtful——"

"That's all right. I just thought he mightn't know. Don't worry yourself any. All you've to do is to give me the picture and get your money, and the deal's okay. What did you pay him?"

"Two thousand, but he said he would refund it if you found the picture was a copy and returned it within a month."

"Did he so? Well now, that was vurry considerate of him. Let's have the thing, anyhow."

Mr. Lumley rose and, unlocking the safe, took from it the dispatch case and laid it on the desk before his visitor. With an eagerness that he could no longer control, Snaith withdrew the

picture and, his hands trembling with excitement, tore off the tissue covering. For a moment he gazed at the picture with a gloating satisfaction; then his face changed.

"This is not it," he cried sharply, and his eyes searched Mr. Lumley's face with a look in which suspicion turned rapidly to menace. "By the Lord, if you try to pull any stuff on me, I'll make you wish you had never been born! What's the meaning of it?"

Mr. Lumley, fortified by the knowledge of the presence of his other visitors, took a more lofty tone than he otherwise might have essayed.

"Really, Mr. Snaith," he answered in cold tones, "you forget yourself. I am not accustomed to be spoken to in that way. When you apologize I'll continue the conversation, not before."

For a moment it seemed as if Snaith would resort to violence. Then an idea seemed to strike him, and he controlled himself with an obvious effort and spoke again.

"No offense—no offense," he growled irritably. "You're so plaguey set on your dignity. But explain. That's not Lord Arthur's picture."

"That is Lord Arthur's picture," Mr. Lumley asserted stoutly.

"Then you've been monkeying with it. It's not the frame."

"It's not the frame, I know, and if you had been more civil I should express greater regret. As a matter of fact, I dropped the picture—most carelessly, I admit—but it slipped——"

Snaith's gaze had fixed itself on Mr. Lumley with a dreadful intensity. At last, unable to control himself any longer, he burst out:

"Darn it all, man, get to the point, can't you! Where is the frame now?"

"It's here. As I was saying, I dropped the picture and damaged the corner of the frame. I got it reframed, but the old frame was sent back also."

Mr. Snaith sat back limply and wiped his forehead.

"Why the blazes couldn't you say so at once?" he growled. "I'll have the old frame, too."

Mr. Lumley turned back to his safe.

"There," he said, quite rudely for him, "I hope you're satisfied that's the right one."

Snaith took the frame and examined it minutely. Then he turned it over and looked at the back. For a moment he remained motionless, then he hurled it onto the desk and sprang to his feet with an inarticulate snarl, his face livid with rage and disappointment.

"You thief!" he yelled with a bitter oath. "You—thief! If you don't shell out within ten seconds I'll send you straight to hell!" and the appalled Mr. Lumley found himself gazing directly into the bore of a small, evil-looking automatic pistol.

But at that moment there was an interruption. A quiet voice broke in conversationally:

"Now, none of that, Mr. William Jenkins—none of that. It's on you this time, I guess. Put it down and give in like a man when you're beaten."

Snaith, thunderstruck, turned to see the two inspectors covering him with their revolvers. His jaw dropped. For a moment it seemed as if he were going to show fight; then, slowly, his fingers relaxed and the pistol fell on the desk.

"The darbies, Hughes," went on Niblock, "and then we can put away our toys and have a chat."

Snaith seemed utterly dumbfounded, and he made no resistance as the sergeant first pocketed the pistol and then handcuffed him.

When he was rendered harmless, Niblock turned to Mr. Lumley.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said courteously, "for having had to submit you to this, but we had to let him demonstrate before witnesses that he was after the frame, and not the picture. Thanks to you, sir, he has done that pretty completely." He turned to the prisoner. "I have to warn you, Jenkins, that whatever you say may be used in evidence against you, but at the same time, if you wish to make a statement, I will take it."

The prisoner, apparently stupefied at the sudden turning of the tables, made no reply.

"In that case," Niblock resumed, "we had better get away. With your permission, we'll take the picture and the frame, Mr. Lumley, and later I'll call and explain anything that may still be puzzling you."

Two days later Mr. Lumley called at the Yard in response to an invitation from Inspector Niblock. There he met the two inspectors and their chief, as well as Lord Arthur Wentworth. As Mr. Lumley entered the room, the latter sprang to his feet and came forward with outstretched hand.

"And this is the man to whom I owe so much," he cried warmly. "Allow me, my dear sir, to express my great gratitude and appreciation of your actions."

His lordship beamed as he pumped Mr. Lumley's hand up and down.

"But," said Mr. Lumley in some embarrassment, "I can assure you, Lord Arthur, that I am still in ignorance of what I have done."

"You will soon know all about it. Tell him, inspector. You are better up in details than I."

"Mr. Lumley, sir," began Niblock, leaning forward and tapping the desk with his forefinger, "your friend, Mr. Dobbs, valued that picture at about forty pounds, and Snaith or Jenkins at two thousand—to you at least." The inspector's voice became very impressive. "They were both wrong. The actual value of that picture was something over five-and-forty thousand pounds."

Mr. Lumley gasped.

"And would you like to see what gave it its value?" went on Niblock, evidently relishing mightily the sensation he was creating. He opened a drawer in his desk, took out a little box, and out of it poured onto the table what seemed a stream of silvery light.

"Pearls! A necklace!" ejaculated Mr. Lumley.

"A necklace, yes," went on Niblock. "More than that. *The* necklace. Lady Wentworth's celebrated pearl necklace, valued at forty-five thousand pounds, which was stolen from her over six months ago."

"I remember," cried Mr. Lumley helplessly. "I read of it at the time. But how——?" he looked his question.

"I'll tell you, sir. Some nine or ten months ago Lord Arthur took on a footman, a young man named William Jenkins. He proved himself a capable servant, and seemed eminently respectable and trustworthy. But he was your Silas S. Snaith.

"Some three months after he arrived there was a big dance at Wentworth Hall, at which her ladyship intended to wear her necklace. Lord Arthur took it from his safe and handed it to her about seven P.M. She did not wear it at dinner, which was a comparatively hurried affair, but left it in a drawer of her dressing table. When she went up about eight thirty to dress for the ball it was gone.

"The alarm was immediately given, and a private detective, who was in attendance, took charge. Police were telephoned for and a ring was made around the house, and no one was allowed to leave unless vouched for. The guests were by this time arriving, but the matter was hushed up and the dance went on.

"In the searching inquiry that followed suspicion at first fell on Jenkins, as being the newcomer. It was further shown that he was out of observation for five minutes between seven and eight P.M., in which time he could have visited Lady Wentworth's room. But it was also shown that he could not possibly have left the house

nor communicated with an accomplice outside. Therefore, as none of the pearls had come into the market, we came to the conclusion that the thief had hidden them in some place about the house. But the most careful search failed to reveal them.

"You may understand then, sir," Inspector Niblock continued, bowing to Mr. Lumley, "that when I heard that a man of the description of Jenkins was offering a huge sum of money for a valueless picture from the study of Wentworth Hall, I became interested, and when you selected Jenkins from the Hall servants I became more interested still. My colleague and I got the picture from you, and we found that a groove had been cut right round the back of the frame and filled with putty, in which was embedded the necklace. We removed the pearls and fixed up that test with the frame, to make sure it was that he was after. I may say that Jenkins has confessed.

"It appears he is an old friend of Lucille's, her ladyship's maid, and she had often spoken in his hearing about the necklace. He had determined to have a try for it, believing he could sell the pearls singly and in different places. He made friends with the butler, got his support, and so his job. He had decided he could never get directly away with the swag, so he looked around for a hiding place, eventually choosing the frame of this picture. The hiding place was prepared for weeks beforehand.

"On the evening of the dance Lucille told him the necklace was to be worn. He pumped her as to its resting place, and while everyone was at dinner, he slipped up to her ladyship's room, snatched up the necklace, ran to the study, and hid it in the hiding place.

"He lay low while the search continued, but three months later gave his notice and left. He had then to find some way of getting the picture. He could not go to the Hall himself as he would be known, and I think it really is not easy to devise a better plan than that he adopted."

It remains only to be told that Mr. Lumley shortly became the happy recipient of those same notes for two thousand pounds which he had handed to Lord Arthur, together with a check for the promised reward of a thousand pounds, his lordship holding that of all concerned the commission agent had the best right to the money.

BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon

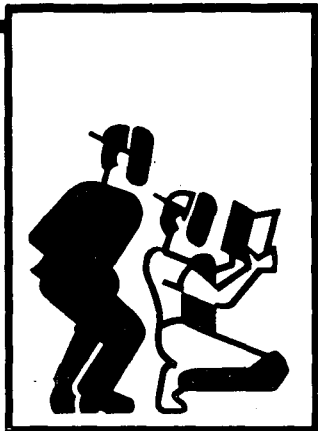


Illustration by Jim Galsen

Arthur Lyons, whose series featuring L.A. investigator Jacob Asch has been the subject of a profile in these pages, has added another book to the canon. **Fast Fade** (Mysterious Press, \$15.95, 224 pp.) has Asch mostly prowling around Palm Springs, though he's assuredly on his own home turf: his investigation is of a director in the movie biz, an industry that still lords it over all others in L.A. The case promises to be somewhat intriguing, even if Asch expects to conclude it quickly. His client has a fuzzy magazine photo of a man—movie director Walter Cairns, so the caption claims, but Asch's client says that Cairns is actually William McVey, her ex-husband and father of her daughter, a man who disappeared years earlier. A violent death disrupts the Palm Beach movie shooting schedule, and doesn't make Asch's job any easier. Worse, it soon appears that first death might just be a preview of a full-length feature yet to come. This is gritty, tough stuff for readers looking for a new author in the Chandler tradition, as well as for old Lyons fans.

Robert Goldsborough's latest Nero Wolfe tale, **Death on Deadline**, proves that the first one (*Murder in E Minor*) was no fluke (Bantam, \$14.95, 185 pp.). Here lives again the Stout detective (pun intended) in all his glory, grumbling about this and that, savoring the gourmet concoctions served up by the live-in chef,

Fritz. Here too is the ever-reliable right-hand man and trusty legs of the Great One, Archie, whose jaunty style of chronicling the tale provides the reader with peeks into the menus, the mail, and even the orchid rooms on the brownstone's roof. And the case is a worthy one: Wolfe, to Archie's surprise, has decided to interfere in what seems the imminent and inevitable sale of the *New York Gazette* to Ian McLaren, mogul of Britain's tabloids, a man dedicated to serving up the "news" in captioned pictures and huge headlines only. A death quickly turns Wolfe's cause into a case . . . I can't say more. Just read *Death on Deadline* slowly, and feast on the latest Nero Wolfe investigation.

On another note entirely, author Simon Brett has created a delightful new character and introduces her in a bright showcase mystery titled **A Nice Class of Corpse** (Scribner's, \$13.95, 221 pp.). Joining a respectable and beloved list of single sleuths in their middle years (or more) is the congenial and shrewd Melita Pargeter, a British widow whose late husband (of dubious occupation) left Melita many joyful memories, and a surprisingly varied and useful bag of tricks. When she checks into the very, very respectable Devereux Hotel, however, she never expects to require that professional know-how. The Devereux Hotel is a small seaside home for monied retirees, a place advertised as serene, relaxing, and totally suitable. But Melita believes murder—even if made to appear accidental—is altogether *unsuitable*, and she quite competently goes about uncovering the truth. This proves to be jolly-good fun.

Murder at the Mimosa Inn is the second mystery by Joan Hess to feature the adventures of Claire Molloy, owner of a cosy bookshop, single mother of a precocious teenaged daughter. Claire, who proved her mettle in *Strangled Prose* (Ballantine, \$2.95, 184 pp.), has accepted an invitation to attend a "murder weekend" at a renovated inn run by a young couple whom she likes. The appearance of a real corpse won't surprise too many readers, but Claire's search for the killer—definitely not hand-in-hand with the police, present in the person of Peter Rosen (who also appeared in the first novel)—does offer a few surprises. The real joy here, however, is the bright and cheerful Claire, something different in the usual run of amateur detectives. (St. Martin's Press, \$13.95, 184 pp.)

Another breath of fresh air is Robert Campbell's amateur detective from *The Junkyard Dog*, brought back to solve a double murder in **The 600 Pound Gorilla**. Protagonist Jimmy Flannery is a Chicago native and precinct captain of the 27th Ward. He is

part of the old Daley political machine, the son of another city worker; but Flannery is sincere and honest and determined to protect "his own," the citizens of the 27th. The fatal beatings of two gay men—apparently the work of an enraged gorilla, Chicago's best-loved zoo resident, who was housed temporarily in the Paradise Baths (it's a long story!)—took place in Jimmy's precinct. And even when it looks as if his investigation is going to be dangerous—and not just politically, either—the tenacious Irishman won't quit. Campbell has created several very real characters, has placed them in an authentic milieu, and has even captured the Chicagoan's colloquial speech. A good sense of humor adds just the right touch. (Signet, \$2.95, 236 pp.)

Two authors who have been profile subjects have recently published new books. **Lady Yesterday** (Houghton Mifflin, \$15.95, 194 pp.) by Loren D. Estleman brings back Detroit's private detective Amos Walker, who's in top form as he digs into the past of a black jazz musician and finds himself buried in a complex tale of drugs and gangsters. And Stephen Greenleaf brings back John Marshall Tanner in **Toll Call** (Villard Books, \$16.95, 311 pp.). This case is a tough one for the ex-lawyer P.I. because it involves his secretary and friend, Peggy, whom Tanner thought he knew well . . . until now. The plot deals with sexual enslavement, probes dark places and secret fears, and takes *Toll Call* into the realm of the psychological suspense tale. The change may not delight all of Greenleaf's fans, but one has to admire the strained tension he creates to heighten the suspense.

On a lighter note is Elliott Roosevelt's latest mystery featuring his late mother, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, as sleuth. **The White House Pantry Murder** (St. Martin's, \$15.95, 231 pp.) is set at Christmastime in 1941. The mood is somber beneath the usual festivities because America is at war. Winston Churchill is a guest at the White House, and the halls and lawns are full of FBI agents and security men pledged to protect the two great leaders of the Allied powers. So how is it possible that a stranger—soon identified as a German agent—is found murdered in the pantry, when no one saw him enter the premises? Like Eleanor's earlier "cases," she is ably aided by professionals, though her instincts and sense of fair play once again serve her well. This is well-drawn and seriously wrought, though the portrait of an earlier, more innocent time in our history lends these mysteries a gentle, old fashioned tone. You'll like them.

Death on Demand is Carolyn G. Hart's new novel (Bantam,

\$2.95, 195 pp.). It's also the name of heroine Annie Laurance's mystery bookshop, located on Broward's Rock Island off the coast of South Carolina. It's during one of Annie's Sunday-night gatherings of resident mystery writers that Elliot Morgan, one of the group, is murdered. This isn't bad for business generally, but it's disastrous for Annie personally because the police decide she's their best suspect. The fact that the deceased had promised (aka "threatened") to expose something dire/scandalous/criminal about each of the group's members on that night doesn't impress the police. It does, however, give Annie a place to start in her own investigation of the crime. This is breezy and spiced with more than a dash of romance, making *Death on Demand* a mystery lover's gothic.

Authors Marcia Muller and Bill Pronzini set for themselves the ambitious task of writing a novel that would incorporate Muller's contemporary chicana detective, the amateur sleuth Elena Oliveres, and Pronzini's nineteenth century private investigator, John Quincannon. The result of this collaboration is **Beyond the Grave** (Walker, \$15.95, 235 pp.), and I'm pleased to report that the book works. The tie between the two is a Mexican wedding coffer which Elena has acquired for the museum of which she's the director. In the antique trunk she finds some of Quincannon's notes about a case he worked on in San Francisco in 1894, a case that actually began during the Bear Flag Rebellion in 1846. There is history and mystery and more in this account: a special treat for fans of the respective detectives, and something different for mystery lovers generally.

SOLUTION TO THE AUGUST "UNSOLVED":

The number of pieces received by each member must be a common factor of 20 and 10. One or 2 would imply that 30 or 15 men arrived late, which cannot be described as a handful. Ten pieces each implies that the last members to arrive were one man which is impossible. So each man received 5 gold pieces and 6 men arrived late. The number of men originally present was little more than 30, because all but a handful could have received an extra gold piece. Also, the total number of members is divisible by 6. So 36 men were present originally, and 42 men are gang members.

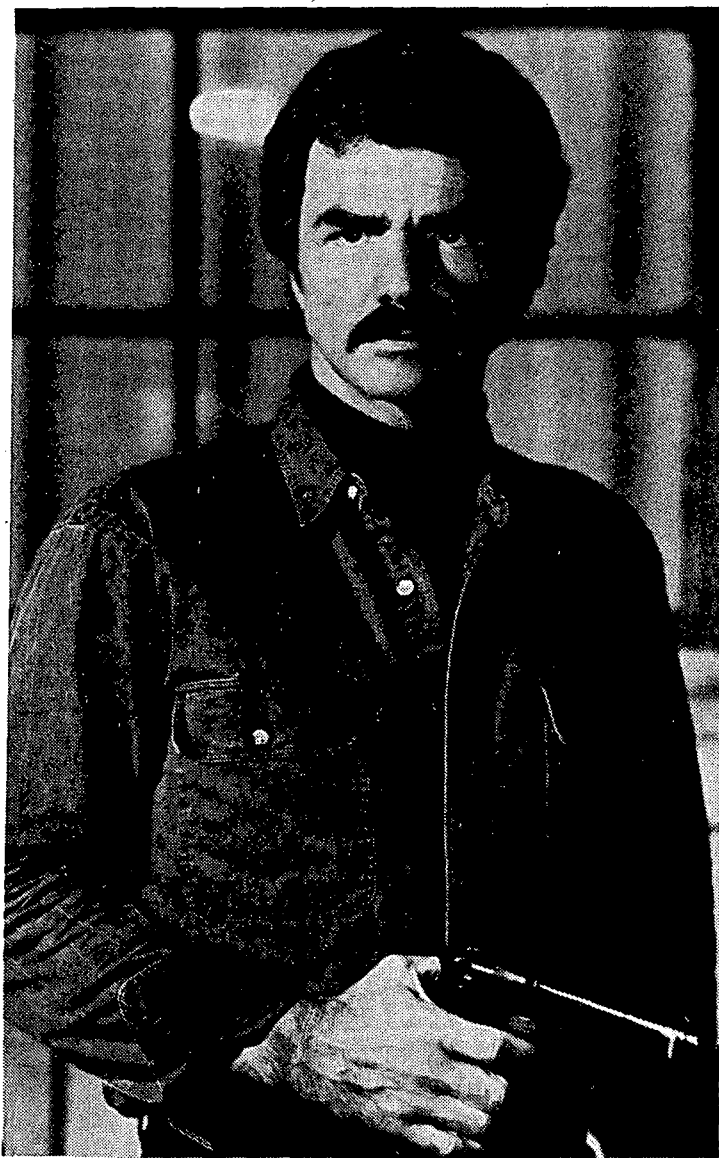


Photo by Douglas Curran. © 1987 Orion Pictures Corporation.

Burt Reynolds as *Malone*

MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



Malone promised to be little more than another Burt Reynolds shoot 'em up. Instead, it turns out to be a thoughtful, sometimes touching suspense story. Reynolds is a Graham Greene-like burnt-out-case of a CIA agent. He leaves the agency the only safe way he knows, which is by cutting all ties with his past. Under the assumed name Malone, he packs a few clothes, a wad of thousand dollar bills, and his deadly, long-nosed revolver. He hops into his 1969 Ford Mustang and drives out west.

When the car breaks down outside an isolated mountain town in Oregon, Malone, who is in no hurry, agrees to wait two days for parts to be delivered. He also accepts an invitation to stay at the home of the garage owner who is to fix the car. This is Paul Barlow, a limping Vietnam vet who lives with his teenaged daughter. By

the time Malone leaves town, a lot of people have been killed, though none without good, solid plot requirements.

It seems that the character played by Cliff Robertson is buying up everyone's land at inflated prices, strongarming and even killing those who try to resist having to sell out and move. When Malone stands up for Paul Barlow's right to keep his modest house and garage, Robertson's redneck stooges start to put the pressure on. It doesn't take more than one beating and a shooting administered to the boys by Malone for Robertson to figure out that he's dealing with a professional. And when Malone also dispatches two top hit men called in from the coast, Robertson proves capable of bringing in the CIA itself, in the form of an alluring female agent (Malone's former lover) played by Lauren Hutton.

Cliff Robertson's sinister

scheme turns out to be pretty routine stuff, though he does own some interesting electronic equipment and has hired a number of suitably baleful looking characters to operate it. Likewise routine are Burt Reynolds' heroics in dealing with the organization. The surprise lies in Reynolds' controlled, restrained performance. For once, he doesn't attempt to appear any younger than he really is. He makes Malone into a hero at once dignified, principled, brave, and modest. Malone convincingly forms a little family with the limping vet and his daughter, revivifies their lives, and then moves on.

It's an old story, of course: the mysterious stranger who cleans up the town and leaves everyone changed just a little bit for the better thanks to having known him. But Reynolds plays the role with such convincing intensity as to make it new all over again.

Just two years ago, in the movie version of Elmore Leonard's *Stick*, Reynolds started off by playing a character much like Malone in his dark, brooding intensity. We complained in our review that halfway through the movie, Reynolds dropped this serious characterization in favor of mugging and smiling. This time, to his credit, he never breaks form.

But the irony is that *Malone*,

Reynolds' forty-third movie, doesn't seem to be doing very well at the box office. For his forty-fourth, Reynolds is sure to go back to playing his patented role as a younger, jocular, uncomplicated, and uninteresting brawler and womanizer.

We were sorry to see **Sleight of Hand** open and close the same week on Broadway. The play featured an intricate murder-detection plot complicated by the lead character's being a magician. The actor, Harry Groener, must have spent at least a year with consultant Charles Reynolds learning how to make a live rabbit and a live pigeon appear and disappear—while he himself is naked from the waist up. There was much stage blood, and deceptions so successful that it was impossible to tell when someone had been "really" killed. (The apparent killing of the rabbit was so convincing that one reviewer assured his readers in advance that the animal doesn't really die.) An unfortunate waste of talent and hard work.

On the other hand, it's a pleasure to report that **The Musical Comedy Murders of 1940**, which we reviewed enthusiastically for the July issue of AHMM, has moved to Broadway for a short run.

THE STORY THAT WON



Arthur Tress

The April Mysterious Photograph contest (photo above) was won by George H. Thompson, Jr., of Raymond, California. Honorable mentions go to H. P. Stabnitz of Markham, Ontario, Canada; Donna J. Norman of Orlando, Florida; Jan Streilin of Johnstown, Pennsylvania; Marion M. MacKay of East Jordan, Michigan; Sandy Edwards of Marion, Indiana; H. Joan Owen of Ogden, Utah; Richard F. Dumas of Apalachicola, Florida; P. Blake Dishmon of Bradford, New Hampshire; Stacey Seaman of Lake Havasu City, Arizona; and Cheri Funk of Palmdale, California.

BABY NEEDS NEW SHOES

by George H. Thompson, Jr.

Inspector Stevens scanned the area intently. Suddenly he nudged the helicopter pilot. "I think there's another one over to the left." He shouted to make himself heard over the noise of the engine.

The pilot swerved his machine into position. The two detectives stationed in the rear reached out with their grappling hook and snared the struggling zoot-suited figure. After handcuffing him, they placed him with several other similarly dressed gentlemen in the rear of the craft.

"Well, Lefty, I guess you guys will never learn not to break the law," one of the cops snorted.

"What do you mean us? You cops are the dumb ones," Lefty retorted.

"How do you figure that?" the cop asked.

"Just look. You've raided the bars. You've boarded up all the abandoned buildings. You've put extra patrolmen in all the parks. By now you should realize that you can't get rid of the Floating Crap Game."

CLASSIFIED

MARKET

AH-SEPT/87

ALFRED HITCHCOCK — published 13 times a year. CLASSIFIED AD rate is \$2.60 per word — payable in advance — (\$39.00 minimum). Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional.

ADDITIONAL INCOME

MAKE MONEY working at home. Free details. Rush self addressed stamped envelope to: **MONEY**, 8508 Parkland Dr. #2, El Paso, TX 79925.

AUTOMOBILES & MIDGET CARS

IS it True...Jeeps For \$44 Through The Government? Call For Facts! 1-312-742-1142 Ext. 4674.

BARGAINS

WHOLESALE Jewelry/Novelties! No minimum order! Rush \$1.00 for complete catalog: **K&M Distributor (AH)**, Fiskeville, R.I. 02823.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

FREE LIST! Used Hardcover mystery and detective fiction. **Dunn's Mysteries**, Box 2544, Meriden, CT 06450.

100,000 science fiction and mystery paperbacks, magazines, hardcovers. Free catalogs! **Pandora's**, Box Z-54, Neche, ND 58265-0133.

FREE CATALOG. Used hardback mystery, crime and detective books. **Steve Powell**, Dept. DP, The Hideaway, Bar Harbor, Maine 04609.

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK! Join our successful authors. Publicity, advertising, beautiful books. All subjects invited. Send for fact-filled booklet and free manuscript report. **Carlton Press**, Dept. SMU, 11 West 32 Street, New York 10001.

SUPERLEARNING! Triple learning speed through music! Develop Supermemory; Control stress; tap potentials. Free book excerpt & catalog (Distributors Wanted). **Superlearning**, 450-Z8 Seventh Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10123.

FREE Catalog! Mystery and Detective Fiction. New, Used, and Rare Hardcover Books. Reasonable Prices! **UNCLE BUCK'S MYSTERIES**, 302 Bellevue Park Drive, Belleville, IL 62223.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

FREE Catalog for mystery addicts; good, used books: **Grave Matters**, Box 32192-D, Cincinnati, Ohio 45232.

MAKE YOUR CLASSIFIED AD PAY. Get "How to Write A Classified Ad That Pulls." Includes certificate worth \$2.00 towards a classified ad in this publication. Send \$2.25 (includes postage) to **I.M. Bozoki**, Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

WRITERS! Lawrence Block's books, tapes, seminars really help! Details free. **WFYL**, 3750-E Estero, Ft. Myers Beach, FL 33931.

HALF PRICE MYSTERY/Sci-Fi. Send for free catalog. **Book Place**, 2710 Middlefield Rd., Palo Alto, CA 94306.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

\$1,000 Weekly Home Business Directory. Free Details. Name and address to: **Box 1610-DP**, Darien, Connecticut, 06820-1610.

STAY HOME! MAKE MONEY ADDRESSING ENVELOPES. VALUABLE GENUINE OFFER. 20¢. Write **Lindco**, 3636-DA Peterson Ave., Chicago, IL 60659.

EXTRA Cash: Mail our Burglar Alarm Advertisement with your flyers. **TT4**, Box 930, Branford, FL 32008.

HOMEWORKERS! EARN 60¢ each envelope you return to us, according to instructions. Write: **Distributors**, Box 431-DP, Lynbrook, New York 11563.

MAILORDER: SELL MONEymaking REPORTS. MAKE 1000% PROFIT! VENTURE-RI, BOX 336, RIVIERA, AZ 86442.

"\$1,000's WEEKLY!" MAILING LETTERS! FANTASTIC OPPORTUNITY! EXCITING FREE DETAILS! \$TART IMMEDIATELY! WRITE: \$UCCESS, #605-DPG, DRESHER, PA 19025.

PLACE

CLASSIFIED

AH-SEPT/87

To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

BUY IT WHOLESALE

400,000 BARGAINS Below Wholesale! Many Free! Liquidations ... Closeouts ... Job Lots ... Single Samples. Free Details. Worldwide Bargainhunters, Box 1409-IO, Holland, MI 49424.

FIREWORKS! Great prices! Huge selection! Free catalog. Kellners Fireworks, Box 67, Oil City, PA 16301.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

WITCHCRAFT Occult Miracle Power Secrets Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Now accepting students. 1502-AN, Newbern, NC 28560.

FOOD

PISTACHIOS \$2.99 pound. Banana chips 99¢ pound. Gummy bears \$1.39 pound. Blueberry honey \$1.35 pound. Other nuts, dried fruits, candies and honeys at similar savings. Catalog \$1.00 (refundable). Barbara Ann's Quality Foods, 110NH Valley Road, Ashley, DE 19804.

GIFTS THAT PLEASE

A gift sure to please—ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, published monthly. Send \$19.50 for 13 issues (includes shipping & postage) to Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, P.O. Box 1933, Marion, OH 43305.

HYPNOTISM

FREE hypnotism, sleep learning catalog! Tape cassettes, books, equipment. DLMH, Box 487, Anaheim, CA 92805.

JEWELRY

CLOSEOUT JEWELRY. 55¢ Dozen. 25¢ gets catalog. ROUSSELS, 107-310 Dow, Arlington, MA 02174-7199.

LOANS BY MAIL

BORROW \$25,000 "OVERNIGHT." Any purpose. Keep indefinitely! Free Report! Success Research, Box 19739-SW, Indianapolis, IN 46219.

LOANS BY MAIL—Cont'd

CASH GRANTS available from nonprofit foundations! Never Repay! 340 sources/application instructions—\$3.00. Fundsearch, Box 191077-SR, Washington, DC 20036.

GET Visa/Mastercard; Easy qualifying! Quick personal/business loans. National Finance, Box 35726-FT, Richmond, VA 23235.

MAILING LISTS

QUALITY NAMES AT QUALITY PRICES! Fresh opportunity seekers available for immediate shipment! D-CO, 1-219-838-7099/1-800-992-9405.

COMPUTERIZED GUARANTEED MAIL ORDER NAMES! SPECIAL 2000 NAMES—\$29.00. Opportunity seekers. Zip-sorted pressure sensitive labels. 22¢ refund for undeliverables. Mailed within 24 hrs. 1st class. 200 samples-\$8, 500-\$11, 1000-\$20, 5000-\$65, 10,000-\$110, 20,000-\$190, 40,000-\$340, 100,000-\$750, 200,000-\$1300. DEALERS WANTED. Sell names. Start FREE. The Brown Co., RR 2, Box 151, River Falls, Wisconsin 54022.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

CAN You stuff 1000 envelopes for \$500.00 weekly? Send six 22¢ stamps. Blume, Box 866714, Plano, TX 75086.

EARN \$5,000 ANY WEEKEND! Amazing new system makes it easy. No money needed. Skeptical? FREE PROOF. Write: Crossroads, Box 5097-B11, Babylon, NY 11707.

EARN \$15 to \$50 an hour with a pickup truck or van. Tuller's Treasures, 958 College Ave., Elmira, NY 14901.

WOULD YOU STUFF 1000 envelopes for \$1,000.00? Find out how. Sase To: Clemens Enterprises D, 3528 Esplendor Ave., Irving, Texas 75062.

Classified Continued

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

"HUNDREDS WEEKLY"! GUARANTEED PROCESSING STAMPED ENVELOPES! START IMMEDIATELY! FREE DETAILS! WRITE: MJG-DPG, AMBLER, PA 19002.

FIRST TIME OPPORTUNITY TO GET RICH EASY. NEW MIRACLE SECRETS! Legal 100%, Honest 200%, Profitable 800%. Guaranteed Plans! Now send \$3.00 for details: A-S Int'l Enterprise, 1018 Gold Cres., Dept. 210, Ottawa, Ont., Canada K2B 8C5.

\$60.00 per Hundred securing-stuffing envelopes from home. Offer-details: Rush stamped self-addressed envelope. Imperial, P-460, X17410, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33318.

GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Processing mail! Free Supplies, Postage! No Selling! Information? Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-DCM, Burnt Hills, NY 12027.

EASY Business, earn \$1,000's Weekly! Free details! Send Stamped Addressed Envelope: Todco, Dept. 3, 4219 W. Olive Ave., Burbank, CA 91505.

\$1000 WEEKLY POSSIBLE! Mailing Envelopes! Easy Guaranteed Income! Free Details: SEVENSTAR, Box 187-D, Niagara Falls, NY 14305.

GET RICH! Zero Investment. No Borrowing. Free Details. Money, 6520 Selma (#32H77), Los Angeles, CA 90028.

DO YOU KNOW "How to Write a Classified Ad that Pulls?" Instructive booklet tells how. Also includes a certificate worth \$2.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy send \$2.25 (includes postage) to I. M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

VENDING MACHINES. No selling. Routes earn amazing profits. 32-Page Catalogue FREE. Parkway Corporation, 1930NO Greenspring Drive, Timonium, Maryland 21093.

PIANO Tuning learned quickly at home! Free information. Empire School, Box 1014NC, Jupiter, FL 33458.

DIAMONDS!—Gemstones! \$400/week easily earned part-time from home! How to import without experience/capital! Exciting report/sample free!!! Amethyst Box 2348-B4, Niagara Falls, N.Y. 14302-2348.

"OPPORTUNITY Knocks"! We have MLM Wealth building programs that can make you financially independent. Legal! Unlimited Potential! Free Details! Keni, P.O. Box 584, Goshen, N.Y. 10924.

EARN \$1,000's! Home Mailing Program. Immediate opportunity. No experience. Details: JRB, Box 2659-IOM, Danbury, CT 06813.

HUNDREDS Weekly!! Big Company urgently wants Homeworkers!! Rush Stamped envelope!! Mitchell, Box 11453HA, Eugene, Oregon 97440.

OF INTEREST TO ALL

PROTECT Your home and loved ones from crime. Free FBI crime report. Write to: Security and Protection, Box 418207, Cin. O. 45241.

PATENT SERVICE

NEW IDEA? Innovation Center in Washington, D.C., will assist you through research and development! Free Kit: (800) 257-7880.

**YOU'LL MAKE
MONEY**

**SAVE MONEY TOO—
BY READING and ANSWERING
THESE CLASSIFIED ADS**

Classified Continued

AH-SEPT/87

PERSONAL

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people, 18-80. Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

PEN PALS. Make new friends. Details, \$1 (P&H). B. Alston, POB 8101, Temple Hills, MD 20748.

WITCHCRAFT Occult Miracle Power Secrets Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Now accepting students. 1502-AN, Newbern, NC 28560.

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP AND MARRIAGE. American—Mexican—Philippine—European. Photo selection FREE! Latins, Box 1716-DD, Chula Vista, CA 92012.

NATIONWIDE Singles Magazine. Send Name, Address, Age. Send No Money. Exchange, 1817 Welton #1580, Denver, Colo. 80202.

ORIENTAL ladies seeking correspondence, marriage. Presentations by American husband, Filipina wife. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948.

SINGLES, US/WORLDWIDE, seek enlightened correspondence, sincere friendships. SCANNA INTERNATIONAL-CO3, Box 4, Pittsford, NY 14534.

ASIAN WOMEN desire Romance! Sunshine International Correspondence—Dept. HF, Box 260, North Hollywood, CA 91603. (818) 769-1717.

RECIPES

WHAT'S FOR DINNER? BRAND NEW RECIPES AND MORE! \$4.95. Arleen, 1358 Cutforth Court, San Jose, CA 95132.

12 Italian recipes. Send \$2.95 to: A. Leonard, P.O. Box 10656, Mpls., MN 55458.

SONGWRITERS

POEMS WANTED. Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

TAPES & CASSETTES

OLDTIME radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, PA 17349.

MYSTERY/SUSPENSE VIDEOS. Classics, Rare Films, Modern detective thrillers. Charade, Dark Passage, Spellbound, Thin Man, Maltese Falcon. Send \$2.00 for catalog To: A & R VIDEO, Box 2066, Littleton, CO 80161.

UNUSUAL BOOKS

THE INTELLIGENCE LIBRARY: Many unique books & official manuals on RESTRICTED subjects—Bugging, Wiretapping, Locksmithing, Covert Investigation, & MUCH MORE. Free brochures, MENTOR, DP, 135-53 No. Blvd., Flushing, N.Y. 11354.

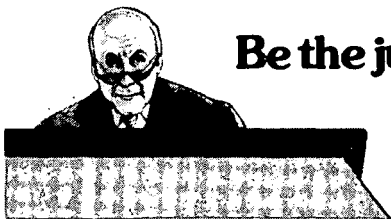
PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR FICTION COMBINATIONS:

OR TRY ONE OF OUR OTHER COMBINATIONS:

Combo #1, Combo #2, or Combo #3.

Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.

For further information write to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.



Be the judge and jury for just \$1.

Get \$174.40 worth of Best Selling Mysteries for \$1.

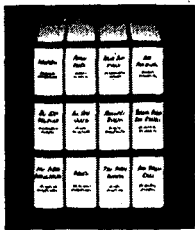
- ☒ You get twelve full-length novels for \$1. ☒ Select only the books you want.
☒ Save 60 to 80% off original publishers' prices. ☒ Pay no money in advance, ever.

JUDGE FOR YOURSELF. Our mystery books are the best spine-tinglers anywhere. To introduce you to these gripping tales of suspense and intrigue, we're making this remarkable offer... For only \$1, The Detective Book Club will send you these twelve full-length novels, each a masterpiece of mystery. Bought separately, these twelve novels would cost you \$174.40. For this special trial offer, all twelve are yours, in four handsome, hardcover triple-volumes as shown, for only \$1 plus shipping. An incredible value.

SAVE 60-80%. As a member you are **GUARANTEED** a savings of 60-80% off original publishers' prices. That's a savings of at least \$22 for each triple-volume you choose to own. And most importantly, you will select from only the best of the more-than-400 mysteries published yearly. Authors like Donald E. Westlake, Hammond Innes and Hugh Pentecost. For any triple-volume you select, you pay just \$9.95 plus shipping... that's only \$3.32 for each easy-to-read, unabridged, full-length mystery.

There's No Mystery! There is no mystery to how our club works. Six times a year you will receive, free, the club's Preview describing upcoming selections. As a member, you may reject any volume before or after receiving it.

There is never a minimum number of books to buy, and you may return any unwanted selection within 21 days and owe nothing. And of course, you may cancel your membership at any time. As one of the oldest book clubs in America, we want you to be satisfied. Simply fill out the coupon and return it to: The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, NY 11576.



Please enroll me as a member and send me my four triple-volumes shown here, containing twelve mysteries. I enclose no money now. I'll examine them for 10 days, then will either accept all for \$1 plus shipping, or return them and owe nothing.

As a member, I will receive, free, the club's Preview which describes my next selections. I will always have at least 10 days to reject any volume by returning the form provided. I may return any book within 21 days and owe nothing. For each volume I keep, I'll send you \$9.95 plus shipping. I may cancel my membership at any time. Satisfaction Guaranteed.

87-BP
D24M4V

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, Roslyn, NY 11576

Mr./Mrs./Ms. _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

PUBLISHED BY
WALTER J. BLACK, INC.



ESTABLISHED 1923

Note: Members accepted in USA and Canada only. Offer slightly different in Canada.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A TERRIFYING NEW MASTERWORK BY

FREDERIK POHL

Terror

Clouded in secrecy and protected from land, sea, and air, Project Vulcan would tap the life-energy of the Earth's core. The doomsday bomb carefully placed at the weakest edge of an underwater volcano off the Hawaiian coast would cover the Earth in a dust cloud that would bring food production to a grinding halt.

Now Vulcan has fallen into the hands of terrorists. And the world watches as they grip the detonator—and make their demands.

"A daring writer...Pohl has always been willing to try something new in his fiction."

—A Reader's Guide to Science Fiction

THE MILITARY'S ULTIMATE DOOMSDAY
WEAPON HAS BEEN DISCOVERED
—BY TERRORISTS

Terror

Read and Report Award Winner
Audiobook of the Year
FREDERIK POHL

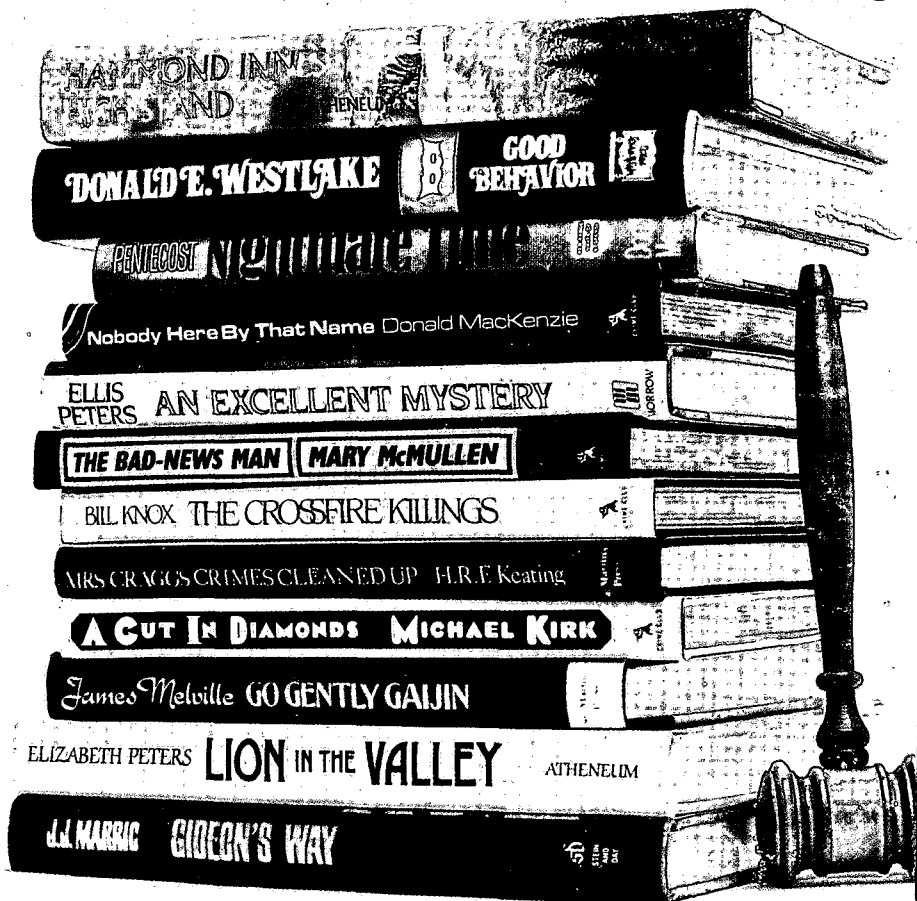


BERKLEY SCIENCE FICTION

\$2.95

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE EVIDENCE.



12 MYSTERIES FOR ONLY \$1

LICENSED TO N2ORE
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED